# Texts and their Worlds II

Edited by

K. Narayana Chandran

**Texts and their Worlds II**

# EUROPEN AND NON-EUROPEAN WRITING: AN INTRODUCTION

**K. Narayana Chandran**

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# Introduction

The present syllabus committee, constituted to work on the Final Year Optional English Course, inherited a ready-made ground plan:

Paper I: British Literature from Chaucer to the Romantics
Paper II: Victorian and Modern British Literature and American Literature
Paper III: Indian Writing in English
Paper IV: World Literature

Our initial discussions as a team led us to the development of a certain rationale. A very important basis of this rationale was the concern that certain very significant regional and linguistic specificities be addressed in the texts chosen for papers Ill and IV. It also led to some modifications of the original titles. As a result, Paper III is now tided Literatures of India: An Introduction and Paper IV is tided European and Non-European Writing: An Introduction. It is to make the rationale behind these two papers clear and accessible to both students and teachers that we have undertaken to write an introduction to this textbook. We would like this textbook to be seen as a textual initiative, a primary stage in an on-going process of continuing explorations of texts and their worlds.

As their titles suggest, these papers attempt to introduce the Student to literatures Of India, Europe and non-European nations. They do not provide an exhaustive experience of literature, if, indeed, that were at all possible. We hope that the selected texts will initiate a varied reading experience that will, perhaps, even transcend the confines of the undergraduate classroom.

## Texts and their Worlds: A Definition of Rationale

As the title of this textbook suggests, we have attempted to present in these selections a sampling Of diverse texts which open windows into the worlds in which they were created. Each of the selections is the voice of a particular world: the old world of white supremacy and the new one of the 'othered' identity staking its claim to an equality of recognition and value; the world of the slave and the

equality of recognition and value; the world of the slave and the world of the free; the idealism of nations waiting to be born, of others waiting to find voice; the world Of woman and the world Of man… . All and each bid the reader to think, to understand, and, most importantly, to deploy these idee beyond the classroom.

Paper III, namely, The Literatures India: An Introduction, integrates Indian writing in English with Indian literature in translation. A number of advantages present themselves as a result of this redefinition: it explores the problematic notion of an 'Indian' literature; it allows us to read literatures written in English in India alongside all other literatures produced in India, providing tremendous scope for discussions of commonalties and differences; it challenges assumptions about the 'Indianness' of regional literatures versus the 'foreignness' of Indian literature in English, thereby facilitating a transcendence of linguistic nativism; it encourages an examination of common 'Indian' as well as 'local' and 'regional' issues; it enables an examination of the necessary politics of language and an ethnic and national identity.

Paper IV is now called European and Non-European Writing: An Introduction. It is oriented towards examining both European and non-European writing, with issues, styles, concerns and techniques specific to region, nation and culture. It includes both the established or canonical writings of Western Europe, beginning with the Greeks, as well as the less represented writings from Eastern Europe, Africa, Latin America, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies, providing scope for critical analyses of commonalties and differences. Several of the selections address the politics of language, certainly a major issue, particularly with regard to African and aboriginal writings. It also provides scope for the formation of different perspectives and establishes equal validity of all human experience.

In both papers, the primary focus has been on what Harish Trivedi has called a 'two-way transaction' Of reception and representation. For Trivedi, reception implies 'how we in India responded to English literature' and representation 'how India was depicted in English Literature'. In both papers these issues of depiction, self-perception and place and position of texts and their contexts have been crucial to the process of selection. Therefore, we have tried to include as many texts as possible focussing on issues of gender, race, human rights and other significant concerns, which act as

springboards for textual exploration. We have attempted to design a syllabus that will make the study of literary and non-literary texts relevant to the students' understanding of their world and of worlds beyond their own, while also preparing them for a meaningful participation in and contribution to that world—this being the ultimate goal of a holistic and meaningful education.

## Design and Structure of the Syllabus

Three significant aspects determined the selection and presentation of the texts in this syllabus:

a. historical and linguistic considerations
b generic representation
c. connectivity between critical theory/essays and the selected texts

We believe that historical factors and genre are of crucial importance to the actual teaching of literature at the undergraduate level. Every teacher will agree that the student needs to be able to categorize literatures according to their historical, regional and formal distinctions. However, as any contemporary exploration of this subject shows, the lines separating antiquity and modernity, as well as those segregating one genre from another very often become blurred. Factors such as the practical realities Of departmental functioning, distribution of work among teachers, areas of teacher specialization, the important considerations of the teachabili5 of texts in the classroom and across a wide spectrum of student abilities, as well as that all-important consideration in the Indian system Of education—testing—have been kept in mind.

Historical and Linguistic Considerations: Both papers include the classical and the contemporary. Linguistic considerations have been of particular importance in Paper III which introduces ancient Sanskrit writing, the writing of pre-Independence India, the modernism of the post-Independence era and finally, contemporary writing. Paper IV makes a traditional beginning with the ancient Greeks with Sophocles and Euripides, moves on to the Renaissance world, the modernism of Gogol and Ibsen and also the contemporary literatures of the Commonwealth.

Generic representation: In the earlier syllabus, Paper III dealt with British poetry and drama, and Paper IV with fiction and criticism. The scope of this syllabus being as wide as it is across the two papers, there is a need for a clear generic representation of the selections. This also makes it simpler for departments to divide teaching portions accordingly.

Connectivity between prescribed essays and texts: As literary theory has been constantly reminding us over the last few decades, all writing is a representation of the important issues that are very much a part of lived reality. In both papers the selected essays include not just critical theoty but also serious engagements with social, cultural, political and educational questions. Teachers and students must approach the teaching and learning of the essays and the texts as one unified and co-besite whole, and not in isolation from each other. It is strongly recommended that teachers familiarize themselves with all the prescribed essays, and incorporate them extensively into the teaching of the texts. It is also recommended that examination question papers should be designed to connect the essays with the literary texts as far as possible.

Working on this syllabus over the last seven months, we have heard different voices within the group and negotiated different assumptions and expectations about the syllabus. We hope the syllabus reflects the polyphonous nature Of our discussions and allows multiple readings to emerge in the classroom.

- This committee would like to place on record its deep appreciation of and gratitude to the following:

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# Part One European Writing

## Section A: Poetry

# UNIT ONE

## from The Trojan Women
## Euripides

**About the author** Euripides (484—406 BC) is considered to be one of the greatest tragic poets of the Greek theatre. He is believed to have written 92 plays of which only 17 tragedies and one satyr play are complete. The Trojan Women was first performed in Athens in 415 BC. Euripides was no poet of cosmic tragedy, but the spirit of compassionate love enabled him to write tragedies of the soul. No other Greek poet could have drawn the picture of suffering and pain that closes The Trojan Women.

The two passages from The Trojan Women, the first spoken by Andromache, and the other by Hecuba, are good samples of Euripides's extraordinary capacity for distilling tender compassion in words. Andromache and Hecuba are no mere mythical characters when they speak Euripides's lines. They speak the sorrow of women

**About the poem** According to Greek mythology, Andromache is wife of Hector, and Hecuba, the mother of Hector. Both are now amortg a group of women whose husbands and sons have been killed in a ten-year war. The Trojan women arenowwaiting to be shipped off to slavery. Hecuba is a queen. Now an old woman, she has suffered indignity after indignity—her husband mowed down before her "B, and her sons killed. She knows umat she will be a slave to the conquerors. Her Cassandra, will be enemys concubine. Her daughter-in-law, Andromache, is told by a Greek messenger called Talthybius that her son must be thrown down from the wall of Troy. Andromache's words are addressed to the child, upon hearing Talthybius's message that 'a hero's son must not grow up'. After the child has been killed, and Andromache gone to Greece in a Greek ship, the dead body of the child is brought to Hecuba. She holds it in her hands and utters words most touching and terrifying. Hecuba too, in the second excerpt, speaks to the child.

ANDROMACHE. Go die, my best beloved, my own, my treasure,
in cruel hands, leaving your mother comfortless.
Your father was too noble. That is why
they kill you. He could save others,
he could not save you for his nobleness.
My bed, my bridal-all for misery-
when long ago I came to Hector's halls
to bear my son-oh, not for Greeks to slay,
but for a ruler over teeming Asia.
Weeping, my little one? There, there.
You cannot know what waits for you.
Why hold me with your hands so fast, cling so fast to me?
You little bird, flying to hide beneath my wings.
And Hector will not come-he will not come,
up from the tomb, great spear in hand, to save you.
Not one of all his kin, of all the Trojan might.
How will it be? Falling down-down-oh, horrible.
And his neck-his breath-all broken.
And none to pity. You little thing,
curled in my arms, you dearest to your mother,
how sweet the fragrance of you.
All nothing then-this breast from where
your baby mouth drew milk, my travail too,
my cares, when I grew wasted watching you.
Kiss me-Never again. Come, closer, closer.
Your mother who bore you-put your arms around my neck.
Now kiss me, lips to lips.
O Greeks, you have found out ways to torture
that are not Greek.
A little child, all innocent of wrong-
you wish to kill him.
O Helen, evil growth, that was sown by Tyndareus,
you are no child of Zeus, as people say.
Many the fathers you were born of,
Madness, Hatred, Red Death, whatever poison
the earth brings forth-no child of Zeus,

the earth brings forth-no child of Zeus,
but Greece's curse and all the world's.
God curse you, with those beautiful eyes
that brought to shame and ruin
Troy's far-famed plains.
Quick! take him-seize him-cast him down-
if so you will. Feast on his flesh.
God has destroyed me, and I cannot-
I cannot save my child from death.
Oh hide my head for shame and fling me
into the ship.

*[She falls, then struggles to her lenees.]*

My fair bridal-I am coming-
Oh, I have lost my child, my own. …

HECUBA. Set the shield down-the great round shield of Hector.
I wish I need not look at it.

*[TALTHYBIUS goes out with the soldiers.]*

You Greeks, your spears are sharp but not your wits.
You feared a child. You murdered him.
Strange murder. You were frightened, then? You thought
he might build up our ruined Troy? And yet
when Hector fought and thousands at his side,
we fell beneath you. Now, when all is lost,
the city captured and the Trojans dead,
a little child like this made you afraid.
The fear that comes when reason goes away-
Myself, I do not wish to share it.

*[She dismisses the Greeks and their ways.]*

*Beloved, what a death has come to you.*
*If you had fallen fighting for the city,*
*if you had known strong youth and love*
*and godlike power, if we could think*
*you had known happiness-if there is*
*happiness anywhere-*
*But now-you saw and knew, but with your soul*

you did not know, and what was in your house
you could not use.
Poor little one. How savagely our ancient walls,
Apollo's towers, have torn away the curls
your mother's fingers wound and where she pressed
her kisses-here where the broken bone grins white-
Oh no-I cannot-
Dear hands, the same dear shape your father's had,
how loosely now you fall. And dear proud lips
forever closed. False words you spoke to me
when you would jump into my bed, call me sweet names
and tell me, Grandmother, when you are dead,
I'll cut off a great lock of hair and lead my soldiers all
to ride out past your tomb.
Not you, but I, old, homeless, childless,
must lay you in your grave, so young,
so miserably dead.
Dear God. How you would run to greet me.
And I would nurse you in my arms, and oh,
so sweet to watch you sleep. All gone.
What could a poet carve upon your tomb?
"A child lies here whom the Greeks feared and slew."
Ah, Greece should boast of that.
Child, they have taken all that was your father's,
but one thing, for your burying, you shall have,
the bronze-barred shield.
It kept safe Hector's mighty arm, but now
it has lost its master.
The grip of his own hand has marked it-dear to me then-
His sweat has stained the rim. Often and often
in battle it rolled down from brows and beard
while Hector held the shield close.
Come, bring such covering for the pitiful dead body
as we still have. God has not left us much
to make a show with. Everything I have
I give you, child.
O men, secure when once good fortune comes—
fools, fools. Fortune's ways—
here now, there now. She springs

away—back—and away, an dance.
No one is ever always fortunate.

## Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| Your father was too noble | *Andromache's husband, Hector* |
| And Hector will not come | *now that the Greeks have slayed him. Also, a reminder of the Greek cruelty that ignored Hector's appeal before dying, 'Spare my body! Let my parents ransom it, and let me receive funeral rites from the sons and daughters of Troy. ' Achilles was so vindictive that he dragged the slain body of Hector to and fro before a crowd, and his parents, Priam and Hecuba. Refer to the later lines, 'O Greeks, you have found out ways to torture/that are not Greek.* |
| that was sown by Tyndareus | *rather inexact because Helen, the immediate cause of the Trojan War, was the daughter of Leda and Jove Leda, however, was Tyndareus's wife. Tyndareus was the king of ncedaemon (Sparta).* |
| You are no child of Zeus | *Zeus (Jupiter) was fabled to have fallen in love with Leda. In the shape of a swan, Zeus violated her. From the egg so laid by the (Leda) swan, came the 'source of all evil', Helen. Hence 'evil growth', but more evil now because she must have been fathered by Madness, Hatred, Red* |

*Translated from Greek*

*Death …. Hecuba's speech follows the arrival of the child's dead body. Andromache has left for Greece as a slave. Hecuba speaks the sorrow of all Trojan women, all bereaved and enslaved.*

You feared a child

*The Greeks feared that the Trojans might gain power in the future and challenge them if Trojan children survived.*

O men, secure when once good fortune comes

*directly addressed to the vainglorious men on both sides who believe that Fortune, the goddess is always with them. Proverbially, Fortune is fickle- minded. She favours one side once, the other, another time.*

Questions for Discussion

1. The speeches of Andromache and Hecuba play on the paradox of standing fast and falling off. Comment on the images that advance this paradox.

2. How does Andromache suggest that the Greek cruelty is exceptional?

3. Compare Andromache's projected vision of her child's death with Hecuba's sight of its dead body.

4. Some scientists of language believe that discrimination against women is evident in two ways: in the way they are taught language, and in the way general language-use treats them. Examine the speeches of Andromache and Hecuba in the light of this view.

5. How forceful is the rhetoric of the two Trojan women? Cite some lines by way of illustration.

# UNIT TWO

## from Canto III of Inferno
## Dante Alighieri

**About the author** Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), the Italian poet, is best remembered for his philosophical allegory, The Divine Comedy. He was a person with varied talents and interests-a soldier, a politician, a man of affairs, a lyric poet, an idealist lover, and a philosopher. He was an ardent student of rhetoric and theology.

Dante was inspired by Beatrice Portinari, a girl of nine whom he met and fell in love with when Dante himself was only nine years old. She died an early death, and Dante married another person, but Beatrice became his ideal, an inspiration of his life. As The Divine Comedy makes it plain, she was the direct agent of his salvation.

**About the poem** The Divine Comedy was completed shortly before Dante's death in 1321. Dante's title to his poem was just Comedy, but his readers have chosen to call it The Divine Comedy. The poem, however, is not a 'comedy' but the term only signifies the progress of its chief character, the poet himself, from damnation (grief) to heavenly bliss (joy). Dante's poem is a journey from life to death and beyond, although the protagonist does not die a physical death. The poet is lost in a forest. He meets Virgil who guides him through Inferno (hell). From Inferno, a subterranean channel leads Dante and Virgil to Purgatory, a mountain. From Purgatory, Dante proceeds in the company of his lady love, Beatrice. Under her guidance, the poet ascends various heavenly spheres including the moon and the sun. As they reach the Empyrean, the ultimate heaven, Beatrice entrusts the poet to St. Bernard of Clairvaux. He is able to see the Trinity in a vision. With this holy moment of illumination (both literal and metaphoric) the journey and the poem end.

Canto III of 'Inferno' is virtually the beginning of Dante's excursion into Hell. His guide is Virgil, the Roman poet. Of course the journey is both fearful and edifying. It takes him through all the

the punishments of the damned. There are nine circles of Hell which have the shape of an inverted cone. Dante and Virgil are at the entrance to Hell. They have not quite entered, and are standing at the threshold. There they read the motto, 'ABANDON HOPE, FOREVER, YOU WHO ENTER', a warning that makes it clear that damnation is eternal.

It is important to remember that the loud grunts and growls of physical discomfort and intellectual chagrin that Dante hears at the entrance are those of souls awaiting admission into Hell. It is not as though all the damned are straightaway admitted to Hell, which, Dante wants us to remember, is not a place for the entirely degenerate and totally useless souls.

Dante's Hell, in other words, is a place not without merit or recognition. In it we find pitiable souls, some whose self-assertive pride elicits even admiration. (One of its denizens is Farinata degli Uberti who holds his head high. He is not repentant, and he has contempt for Hell.) Now, the 'souls … so overwhelmed by grief' Dante asks about are those 'wretched' beings who, as Virgil explains, 'lived a life/but lived it with no blame and with no praise'. Their neutrality, according to Virgil, is indefensible because they were indifferent to life, or rather, to the dharma that makes life worth living. It is of course a sin to be violent, corrupt, insensitive, cruel etc. but it is a greater sin to do absolutely nothing, either way, when your dharma demands action, participation, involvement, and life. Ethical neutrality might be strategically correct and beneficia to you, but it hardly qualifies you as a respectable being either in life or after-life.

As Virgil tells Dante, 'these wretches have no hope of truly dying'. Are they, then, alive? Not quite either. Their trishanku is truly unenviable. They are not worth our slightest discussion as Virgil reminds Dante.

THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO THE DOLEFUL CITY
THROUGH ME THE WAY INTO ETERNAL GRIEF,
THROUGH ME THE WAY AMONG A RACE FORSAKEN.
JUSTICE MOVED MY HEAVENLY CONSTRUCTOR;
DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE CREATED ME,
AND HIGHEST WISDOM JOINED WITH PRIMAL LOVE.
BEFORE ME NOTHING BUT ETERNAL THINGS
WERE MADE, AND I SHALL LAST ETERNALLY.
ABANDON HOPE, FOREVER, YOU WHO ENTER.
I saw these words spelled out in sombre colours
inscribed along the ledge above a gate;
'Master' I said, 'these words I see are cruel.'
He answered me, speaking with experience:
'Now here you must leave all distrust behind;
let all your cowardice die on this spot.
We are at the place where earlier I said
you could expect to see the suffering race
of souls who lost the good of intellect.'
Placing his hand on mine, smiling at me
in such a way that I was reassured,
he led me in, into those mysteries.
Here sighs and cries and shrieks of lamentation
echoed throughout the starless air of Hell;
at first these sounds resounding made me weep:
tongues confused, a language strained in anguish
with cadences of anger, shrill outcries
and raucous groans in time to slapping hands,
raising a whirling storm that turns itself
forever through that air of endless black,
like grains of sand swirling when a whirlwind blows.
And I, in the midst of all this circling horror,
began, 'Teacher, what are these sounds I hear?
What souls are these so overwhelmed by grief?'
And he to me: 'This wretched state of being
is the fate of those sad souls who lived a life
but lived it with no blame and with no praise.
They are mixed with that repulsive choir of angels
neither faithful nor unfaithful to their God,
but undecided in neutrality.
Heaven, to keep its beauty, cast them out,

but even Hell itself would not receive them
for fear the wicked there might glory over them.'
And I: 'Master, what torments do they suffer
that make such bitterness ring through their screams?'
He answered: 'I will tell you in few words:
these wretches have no hope of truly dying,
and this blind life they lead is so abject
it makes them envy every other fate.
The world will not record their having been there;
Heaven's mercy and its justice turn from them.
Let's not discuss them; look and pass them by.'

Translated from Italian

## Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| Divine omnipotence-<br>Highest Wisdom - Primal Love | *the Holy Trinity of Christian faith (Power, Wisdom, Love; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost respectively) Eternal things* |
| Eternal things | *matter, the angels, and the heavens* |
| Neither faithful …<br>undecided in neutrality | *neither devoted nor rebellious, but existed for themselve (There is, however, no mention of these angels in the Bible.)* |
| but even Hell itself …<br>glory over them | *the other sinners were at least able to make up their mind* |

Questions for Discussion

1. What scene does Dante perceive in the Vestibule of Hell? What lesson do we learn from the souls lodged there?

2. Hope abandoned, what promise does the visit hold for Dante?

3. Why is the Vestibule of Hell unenviable?

UNIT THREE

# Ithaka

## Constantine Petrou Cavafy

***About the author*** Constantine Petrou Cavafy (1863-1933) was a poet of unusual talent, wisdom, and commitment to the Greek past. His poetry is distinguished by playful wit and irony, often generated by an awareness of man's smallness in today's world, coupled with memories of human greatness and epic vision. What is lost today, Cavafy believed, was lost to the past, although imagination is a great gift and can, momentarily at least, recreate or resurrect the past. The large categories into which readers assign Cavafy's poetry are philosophical, hedonistic, and historical.

***About the poem*** 'Ithaka' blends mythical vision with historical and political reality. The poem is an exhortation to the adventurous young of today's world, although its references are to the eventful journey of Odysseus from Troy to his kingdom, Ithaka, the subject of Homer's celebrated epic.

When you set out for Ithaka
ask that your way be long,
full of adventure, full of instruction.
The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops,
angry Poseidon - do not fear them:
such as these you will never find
as long as your thought is lofty, as long as a rare
emotion touch your spirit and your body.
The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops,
angry Poseidon - you will not meet them
unless you carry them in your soul,
unless your soul raise them up before you.

Ask that your way be long.
At many a summer dawn to enter

At many a summer dawn to enter
- with what gratitude, what joy -
ports seen for the first time;
to stop at Phoenician trading centres,
and to buy good merchandise,
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,
and sensuous perfumes of every kind,
sensuous perfumes as lavishly as you can;
to visit many Egyptian cities,
to gather stores of knowledge from the learnèd.
Have Ithaka always in your mind.
Your arrival there is what you are destined for.
But don't in the least hurry the journey.
Better it last for years,
so that when you reach the island you are old,
rich with all you have gained on the way,
not expecting Ithaka to give you wealth.
Ithaka has given you the splendid voyage.
Without her you would never have set out,
But she has nothing more to give you.
And if you find her poor,
Ithaka has not deceived you.
So wise have you become, of such experience,
That already you will have understood
What these Ithakas mean.

*Translated from Greek by Edmund Keeley*

## Glossary

The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops

*The Cyclops [also spelt Cyclopes] were one-eyed giants who dwelt in caves on an island. Odysseus robbed them of their victuals by cunning. Carefully planned strategy further helped him and his men escape from the cave of the vindictive Cyclops. The Laistrygonians were another barbarous tribe that confronted Odysseus and his men on their journey to Ithaka. The Greek vessels reached a peaceful-looking harbour; only Odysseus moored his vessel without. As soon as the Laistrygonians found the ships safely within their reach and power, they heaved huge stones which broke and overpowered them. All the vessels with their crews were destroyed, but Odysseus's own ship remained outside trouble. He and his crew escaped unhurt.*

Poseidon

*Greek god of the sea. He was displeased with Odysseus because the Phaecians favoured and rescued him. The angry Poseidon struck Odysseus's ship with the flat of his hand as it was sailing toward Ithaka. He turned the ship, crew and all, into stone. Metaphorically, the Laistrygonians, the Cyclops, and Poseidon are obstacles, sources of danger, and challenges one must contend with in one's journey of life.*

you will not meet them/ unless you carry them in your soul

*The dangers posed by others (your opponents) are nothing if you are mentally prepared to face any situation or confront any danger. Your obstructionists and enemies are always within yourself (fear, laziness, diffidence, lack of enterprise or adventure, and excessive love for home and domestic comforts). They are bugbears created by your imagination. The solution offered by 'Ithaka' is, therefore, to anticipate the worst troubles on your way, and be mentally prepared for any eventuality in life. The road ahead is unknown and fraught with trouble. The ride is not going to be easy. It has never been easy for the best riders.*

Phoenician trading centres …
Egyptian cities …

*proverbially, centres of good business and trade, and material comforts, respectively. Also, places reputed for Oriental wisdom.*

Ithaka

*here, your final port of call, your home. (The Greek word 'nostos' means return home; Odysseus's return journey took him to Ithaka, his home and kingdom. Cf. 'nostalgia' = longing for one's home.) Odysseus returned home wiser, but older.*

## Questions for Discussion

1. How does Cavafy see life? Consider his 'Ithaka' as an allegory.
2. How do Cavafy's allusions to the Odyssey contribute to the richness of 'Ithaka's' significance? Explain with reference to at least two recurrent allusions in the poem.
3. 'Your destination is your destiny.' Is this a fair representation of Cavafy's message in 'Ithaka'? Explain.

UNIT FOUR

# The Burning of the Books
## Bertolt Brecht

**About the author** Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956), German dramatist and poet, is the author of such plays as The Threepenny Opera, Mother Courage and Her Children, and the two Chinese dramatic parables, The Good Woman of Sezuan and The Caucasian Chalk Circle. In 1933 Brecht was banished from his native Germany by the Nazis. He began a 14-year exile thereafter in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and from 1941 to 1947 in the United States of America.

**About the poem** 'The Burning of the Books' has the ring of a parable. (A parable is a short narrative from which a moral can be drawn.) While a confrontation between the Regime and the Writer is nothing quite new, its parabolic telling here makes it easy for us to see why Power and Poetry always suspect and dread each other.

Of course we cannot fault the Regime for destroying 'harmful knowledge,' but we must know why and how such and such is considered harmful and what constitutes knowledge. Does anyone know? How could the Regime presume to know this, when the wiser folk after all are not too sure that there is 'harmful knowledge'? Now the Regime will not explain this. Its machinery-the oxen and the carts suggesting the pre-industrial era ?- overworks to destroy books, the repositories of 'harmful knowledge'. The 'happy' omission here is the banished Writer whose' Books had been passed over.' (Why was (s)he banished? The Regime, again, wouldn't tell.) The 'wings of wrath' on which the Writer rides is highly suggestive on at least two counts. First, the Writer is swifter in flight than the engines of the Regime that are slow and grovelling. The contrast between the dragging caravan of books and the Writer's flying is hard to miss. Second, the Writer is angry because (s)he has been doubly misunderstood by the Regime-first, when it banishes the

Writer presumably by getting his/her message wrong; and secondly, now by reading those books as mere fiction, another word for lies.

The Writer is a 'liar' because (s)he writes of a world that does not exist. The world of the Writer bears no resemblance to the world of political parties and power, law, money, market, goods and services. The poet's anger is both legitimate and faked. Either way, 'The Burning of the Books' dramatises a confrontation that is old and proverbial.

When the Regime commanded that books with harmful knowledge
Should be publicly burned and on all sides
Oxen were forced to drag cartloads of books
To the bonfires, a banished
Writer, one of the best, scanning the list of the
Burned, was shocked to find that his
Books had been passed over. He rushed to his desk
On wings of wrath, and wrote a letter to those in power
Burn me! he wrote with flying pen, burn me! Haven't my books
Always reported the truth? And here you are
Treating me like a liar! I command you:
Burn me!

Translated from German by John Willet

Questions for Discussion

1. Comment on the tone of the narrator in 'The Burning of the Books'.

2. 'Haven't my books/ Always reported the truth?'-Do you think this is a legitimate claim? Why?

3. Why does the Writer say, 'Burn me!'? Do you think this is a challenge? What do you think the Regime will burn: the person, or his/her writings?

UNIT FIVE

# Lot's Wife

## Anna Akhmatova

**About the author** Anna Akhmatova (1888-1966) is the pen name of Anna Andreyevna Gorenko, a Russian poet whose Anno Domini (1922) is still regarded as her most representative collection of poems. Noted for its sharpness and clarity of imagery, her poetry seldom addressed hard political issues and controversies of her time.

**About the poem** Lot, 'the just man' of the Old Testament, was the son of Haram and the nephew of Abraham. An inhabitant of the sinful city of Sodom, Lot escaped death and destruction by fire and brimstone through the ministrations of an angel. Lot's wife (why doesn't she have a name?), however, was turned into a pillar of salt when she disobediently looked back at Sodom. (Lot and his wife were forbidden by the angel to turn back and look at the scene of destruction upon their departure from Sodom. See Genesis 19: 1-26)

And the just man trailed God's messenger
His huge, light shape devoured the back hill.
But uneasiness shadowed his wife and spoke to her:
'It's not too late, you can look back still

At the red towers of Sodom, the place that bore you,
The square in which you sang, the spinning-shed,
At the empty windows of that upper storey
Where children blessed your happy marriage-bed.'

Her eyes that were still turning when a bolt
Of pain shot through them, were instantly blind;
Her body turned into transparent salt,
And her swift legs were rooted to the ground.

Who mourns one woman in a holocaust?
Surely her death has no significance?
Yet in my heart she will never be lost
She who gave up her life to steal one glance.

Translated from Russian by D. M. Thomas

Questions for Discussion

1. Is Lot's wife destroyed by something besides God's punishment? What does the phrase, 'a bolt /Of pain' suggest?

2. How does the speaker/narrator view the experiences of Lot's wife? In other words, would you call this a lyric or a narrative poem? Explain.

3. What new perspective on the Biblical story does 'Lot's Wife' give? Answer by citing specific details from the poem.

4. Is Lot's wife a heroic figure in your view? Why?

5. Akhmatova's poem has been translated into English several times. The translation you have read is the one by the Welsh poet, D.M. Thomas. Here is another translation by the American poet, Richard Wilbur. Compare the two translations to see which of them retells the story more effectively. Consider also the advantage of looking at another translation to see how closer to the source you could reach by this exercise.

## Lot's Wife

The just man followed then his angel guide
Where he strode on the black highway, hulking and bright;
*But a wild grief in his wife's bosom cried,*
*Look back, it is not too late for a last sight*

*Of the red towers of your native Sodom, the square*
*Where once you sang, the gardens you shall mourn,*
*And the tall house with empty window, where*
*You loved your husband and your babes were born.*

She turned, and looking on the bitter view
Her eyes were welded shut by mortal pain;
Into transparent salt her body grew,
And her quick feet were rooted in the plain.

Who would waste tears upon her? Is she not
The least of our losses, this unhappy wife?
Yet in my heart she will not be forgot
Who, for a single glance, gave up her life.

UNIT SIX

# The End and the Beginning
## Wislawa Szymborska

**About the author** Wislawa Szymborska (b.1923) is among the foremost writers in Poland today. The world noticed her when she won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996. Conscious always of her role as a poet and a woman, Szymborska does not consider it essential that she assume these roles, or speak always as a poet, or as a woman. She is basically a poet of down-to-earth reality, of everyday life and events. Until she brings some of these very ordinary objects and events to life, we hardly notice them, or think them to-have the significance they assume in the poet's eyes.

**About the poem** 'Koniec i poczatek' is the Polish title of 'The End and the Beginning', the titular poem of Szymborska's 1993 volume. It is a series of reflections on war, its aftermath; destruction and creation; labour and love; memory and hope-in fact, about a whole gamut of human commitments we tend to forget in the heat of anger and strife. Finally, these reflections end with the sad realization that even such wisdom as man hopes to gain from experience is of no avail. Death that marks the end of wisdom, paradoxically, marks the beginning of folly yet again.

After every war
someone's got to tidy up.
Things won't pick
themselves up, after all.

Someone's got to shove
the rubble to the roadsides
so the carts loaded with corpses
can get by.

Someone's got to trudge
through sludge and ashes,

through the sofa springs,
the shards of glass,
the bloody rags.

Someone's got to lug the post
to prop the wall,
someone's got to glaze the window,
set the door in its frame.

No sound bites, no photo opportunities
and it takes years.
All the cameras have gone
to other wars.

The bridges need to be rebuilt,
the railroad stations, too.
Shirt sleeves will be rolled
to shreds.

Someone, broom in hand,
still remembers how it was.
Someone else listens, nodding
his unshattered head.
But others are bound to be bustling nearby
who'll find all that
a little boring.

From time to time someone still must
dig up a rusted argument
from underneath a bush
and haul it off to the dump.

Those who knew
what this was all about
must make way for those
who know little.
And less than that.
And at last nothing less
than nothing.

Someone's got to lie there
in the grass that covers up
the causes and effects
with a cornstalk in his teeth,
gawking at clouds.

*Translated from Polish by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh*

Questions for Discussion

1. Comment on the use of irony and understatement in Szymborska's 'The End and the Beginning'.

2. Does Szymborska address war or the pity of war? Discuss, citing appropriate passages from the poem.

3. In what significantly revealing way does the 'End' become the 'Beginning' (and vice versa) in Szymborska's poem?

4. What comment on human knowledge does 'The End and the Beginning' make? How seriously would you consider it?

# Part One

# Section B: Short Fiction

# UNIT SEVEN

## War
## Luigi Pirandello

***About the author*** Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936) is a famous Italian and Sicilian writer, better known as a playwright whose ironic tragedies presented characters in unenviable situations where truth is hard to ascertain, and the truth of existence harder to explain. His Six Characters in Search of an Author revolutionized western theatrical practices since the 1920s. In this play Pirandello blends features of tragedy, comedy, farce, and romance in order to suggest that the theatre hasn't yet begun to exploit its tremendous potential among the people to whom it owes sustenance. Few playwrights have so brilliantly explored theatrical realism as to arrive at reality. Pirandello won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934.

***About the story*** Luigi Pirandello's 'War' belongs to that rare species of short fiction that manages to hold our intellectual and emotional reactions in fairly reasonable balance. Neither philosophy nor rhetoric can mean anything less or more than the sheer, cold fact of death. 'War' tells this story. Its message is the same everywhere, notwithstanding the different languages of rhetoric in which we dress it. That it takes a woman to cut through the glorious verbiage of war to show us that we are all too human, after all, adds to the peculiar urgency of her question: 'is your son really dead?' (Is it not ironic, again, that she poses a rhetorical question?) Pirandello, quite suggestively, lets a woman ask this question, virtually 'the last word,' in the story.

The passengers who had left Rome by the night express had had to stop until dawn at the small station of Fabriano in order to continue their journey by the small old-fashioned local joining the main line with Sulmona.

At dawn, in a stuffy and smoky second-class carriage in which five people had already spent the night, a bulky woman in deep

mourning was hoisted in-almost like a shapeless Bundle. Behind her-puffing and moaning, followed her husband-a tiny man, thin and weakly, his face death-white, his eyes small and bright looking shy and uneasy. Having at last taken a seat he politely thanked the passengers who had helped his wife and who had made room for her; then he turned around to the woman trying to pull down the collar of her coat, and politely inquired:

'Are you all right, dear?'

The wife, instead of answering, pulled up her collar again to her eyes, so as to hide her face. 'Nasty world,' muttered the husband with a sad smile. And he felt it his duty to explain to his travelling companions that the poor woman was to be pitied, for the war was taking away from her her only son, a boy of twenty to whom both had devoted their entire life, even breaking up their home at Sulmona to follow him to Rome, where he had to go as a student, then allowing him to volunteer for war with an assurance, however, that at least for six months he would not be sent to the front and now, all of a sudden, receiving a wire saying that he was due to leave in three days' time and asking them to go and see him off.

The woman under the big coat was twisting and wriggling, at times growling like a wild animal, feeling certain that all those explanations would not have aroused even a shadow of sympathy from those people who-most likely-were in the same plight as herself. One of them, who had been listening with attention, said: You should thank God that your son is only leaving now for the front. Mine has been sent there the first day of the war. He has already come back twice wounded and been sent back again to the front.'

'What about me? I have two sons and three nephews at the front,' said another passenger.

'Maybe, but in our case it is our only son,' ventured the husband.

'What difference can it make? You may spoil your only son with excessive attention, but cannot love him, more than you would all your other children if you had any. Paternal love is not like bread that can be broken into pieces and split amongst the children in equal shares. A father gives *all* his love to each one of his children without discrimination, whether it be one or ten,

and if I am suffering now for my two sons, I am not suffering half for each of them but double …'

True … true … 'sighed the embarrassed husband, 'but suppose (of course we all hope it will never be your case) a father has two sons at the front and he loses one of them, there is still one left to console him … while …'

'Yes,' answered the other, getting cross, 'a son left to console him but also a son left for whom he must survive, while in the case of the father of an only son if the son dies the father can die too and put an end to his distress. Which of the two positions is the worse? Don't you see how my case would be worse than yours?'

'Nonsense,' interrupted another traveller, a fat, red-faced man with bloodshot eyes of the palest gray.

He was panting. From his bulging eyes seemed to spurt inner violence of an uncontrolled vitality which his weakened body could hardly contain.

'Nonsense,' he repeated, trying to cover his mouth with his hand so as to hide the two missing front teeth. 'Nonsense. Do we give life to our children for our own benefit?'

The other travellers stared at him in distress. The one who had had his son at the front since the first day of the war sighed: 'You are right. Our children do not belong to us; they belong to the Country…'

'Bosh,' retorted the fat traveller. 'Do we think of the Country when we give life to our children? Our sons are born because … well, because they must be born and when they come to life they take our own life with them. This is the truth. We belong to them but they never belong to us. And when they reach twenty they are exactly what we were at their age. We too had a father and a mother, but there were so many other things as well … girls, cigarettes, illusions, new ties … and the Country, of course, whose call we would have answered-when we were twenty-even if father and mother had said no. Now at our age, the love of our Country is still great, of course, but stronger than it is the love of our children. Is there any one of us here who wouldn't gladly take his son's place at the front if he could?'

There was a silence all round, everybody nodding as to approve.

'Why the -' continued the fat man, 'shouldn't we consider the feelings of our children when they are twenty? Isn't it natural that

at their age they should consider the love for their Country (I amnspeaking of decent boys, of course) even greater than the love for us? Isn't it natural that it should be so, as after all they must look upon us as upon old boys who cannot move any more and must stay at home? If Country exists, if Country is a natural necessity, like bread, of which each of us must eat in order not to die of hunger, somebody must go to defend it. And our sons go, when they are twenty, and they don't want tears, because if they die, they die inflamed and happy (I am speaking, of course, of decent boys). Now, if one dies young and happy, without having the ugly sides of life, the boredom of it, the pettiness, the bitterness of disillusion … what more can we ask for him? Everyone should stop crying; everyone should laugh, as I do … or at least thank God-as I do-because my son, before dying, sent me a message saying that he was dying satisfied at having ended his life in the best way he could have wished. That is why, as you see, I do not even wear mourning …'

He shook his light fawn coat so as to show it; his livid lip over his missing teeth was trembling, his eyes were watery and motionless, and soon after he ended with a shrill laugh which might well have been a sob.

'Quite so … quite so … ' agreed the others.

The woman who, bundled in a corner under her coat, had been sitting and listening had-for the last three months-tried to find in the words of her husband and her friends something to console her in her deep sorrow, something that might show her how a mother should resign herself to send her son not even to death but to a probably dangerous life. Yet not a word had she found amongst the many which had been said … and her grief had been greater in seeing that nobody-as she thought-could share her feelings.

But now the words of the traveller amazed and almost stunned her. She suddenly realized that it wasn't the others who were wrong and who could not understand her but herself who could not rise up to the same height of those fathers and mothers willing to resign themselves, without crying, not only to the departure of their sons but even to their death.

She lifted her head, she bent over from her corner trying to listen with great attention to the details which the fat man was giving to his companions about the way his son had fallen as hero, for his King and his Country, happy and without regrets. It seemed to

his King and his Country, happy and without regrets. It seemed to her that she had stumbled into a world she had never dreamed of, a world so far unknown to her and she was so pleased to hear everyone joining in congratulating that brave father who could so stoically speak of his child's death.

Then suddenly, just as if she had heard nothing of what had been said and almost as if waking up from a dream, she turned to the old man, asking him:

'Then … is your son really dead?'

Everybody stared at her. The old man, too, turned to look at her, fixing his great, bulging, horribly watery light grey eyes, deep in her face. For some little time he tried to answer, but words failed him. He looked and looked at her, almost as if only then-at that silly, incongruous question-he had suddenly realized at least that his son was really dead-gone for ever-for ever. His face contracted, became horribly distorted, then he snatched in haste a handkerchief from his pocket and, to the amazement of everyone, broke into harrowing, heart-rending, uncontrollable sobs.

*Translated by Micheal Pettinati*

Questions for Discussion

1. Describe the feelings of the fat, red-faced man as he tells his story.

2. What makes the fat man think that the Country counts more than anything else in the minds of 'decent boys'?

3. What reason does the fat man give his listeners for not wearing mourning even at his son's death?

4. How does Pirandello suggest the utter helplessness of simple ordinary people in such calamitous situations as war?

5. Do you think that the narrator of 'War' allows a typically male view of war to dominate? How does the narration strike a balance towards its end?

6. Given below is a poem in English by a Pakistani poet. In what way do you think it extends the theme of Pirandello's story?

## The Medal

When the telegram arrived
I was combing my hair in the sun
And gossiping with the servants.
It said the Government were sorry
My husband was dead, killed in action.
For two days I did not know
What had happened. Then I woke
To mother's voice in the next room
Comforting a weeping neighbour
(As if she were the bereaved one).
Slowly, full consciousness returned.
I dressed for the first time as a widow.
I ate my first meal as a widow.
When I was resigned to thinking of him
As lying scattered in a rice-field,
A thighbone here, a breastbone there,
The rest gifted to the vultures,

They printed his name in the papers
And a photograph of his bachelor days.
He had died a hero.
The friends trooped in again
This time to congratulate.
I heard my father accepting
The tributes with a tired mouth.
I was invited to the ceremony
Where the general gave me a medal
And patted my son on the head.
For an entire week the little fellow
Strutted the bazaar
With the medal pinned on his shirt,
And the neighbours gave him sweets.
Now the medal is lying in its box
And is taken out less and less.
What shall I do with it?
A medal has no hands, no lips, no genitals.
It is exactly what it looks like:
Just another piece of bronze.

Taufiq Rafat

7. Since 'war poems' in English focus almost always on male sufferers and survivors, 'The Medal' offers a welcome difference. Does war align the mother of Pirandello's story and the voice in Rafat's poem in a common cause? How?

UNIT EIGHT

# The Guest

## Albert Camus

**About the author** Born in Algeria, Albert Camus (1913-1960) acquired renown as one of France's leading post-War writers and thinkers. Much of his writing is set in a North African context. Forms of isolation and imprisonment are central to the experiences described in such Camus classics as The Stranger (1942) and The Plague. While presenting his very evocative visions of human dread and helplessness, Camus also insists on searching for solutions to the 'absurdity' of modern life. (Do we create conditions of the absurd, or are we helpless victims of such conditions?)

**About the story** 'The Guest' ['L' hote' in French] narrates the story of a French school-teacher who has lived for years on the Algerian plateaux like a seigneur (a feudal lord; a nobleman). 'Daru had been born here. Everywhere else, he felt exiled.' He knows he is to be cut off from the land. Balducci, the old gendarme (French soldier with the duties of a policeman) one day brings him a man, an Arab, accused of murder. The gendarme leaves the Arab prisoner under Daru's care for the night. Daru has also been instructed to hand over the prisoner to Tinguit the following day. Daru of course is in no mood to oblige an one, even the law, but things take a strange turn as he accompanies the Arab on the high and low plains.

'The Guest' is a strange story about a strange man whose strangeness ceases to interest the man himself. In spite of a momentary understanding he manages with the Arab prisoner, Daru is isolated from other men. There is something of Camus himself in Daru. Camus was distrusted or hated by both the French Algerians (the gendarme Balducci being one) and the Arabs who vowed to take revenge on him.

The schoolmaster was watching the two men climb toward him. One was on horseback, the other on foot. They had not yet tackled the abrupt rise leading to the schoolhouse built on the hillside. They were toiling onward, making slow progress in the snow, among the stones, on the vast expanse of the high, deserted plateau. From time to time the horse stumbled. Without hearing anything yet, he could see

the breath issuing from the horse's nostrils. One of the men, at least, knew the region. They were following the trail although it had disappeared days ago under a layer of dirty white snow. The schoolmaster calculated that it would take them half an hour to get onto the hill. It was cold; he went back into the school to get a sweater.

He crossed the empty, frigid classroom. On the blackboard the four rivers of France, drawn with four different coloured chalks, had been flowing toward their estuaries for the past three days. Snow had suddenly fallen in mid-October after eight months of drought without the transition of rain, and the twenty pupils, more or less, who lived in the villages scattered over the plateau had stopped coming. With fair weather they would return. Daru now heated only the single room that was his lodging, adjoining the classroom and giving also onto the plateau to the east. Like the class windows, his window looked to the south too. On that side the school was a few kilometers from the point where the plateau began to slope toward the south. In clear weather could be seen the purple mass of the mountain range where the gap opened onto the desert.

Somewhat warmed, Daru returned to the window from which he had first seen the two men. They were no longer visible. Hence they must have tackled the rise. The sky was not so dark, for the snow had stopped falling during the night. The morning had opened with a dirty light which had scarcely become brighter as the ceiling of clouds lifted. At two in the afternoon it seemed as if the day were merely beginning. But still this was better than those three days when the thick snow was falling amidst unbroken darkness with little gusts of wind that rattled the double door of the classroom. Then Daru had spent long hours in his room, leaving it only to go to the shed and feed the chickens or get some coal. Fortunately the delivery truck from Tadjid, the nearest village to the north, had brought his supplies two days before the blizzard. It would return in forty-eight hours.

Besides, he had enough to resist a siege, for the little room was cluttered with bags of wheat that the administration left as a stock to distribute to those of his pupils whose families had suffered from the drought. Actually they had all been victims because they were all poor. Every day Daru would distribute a ration to the children. They had missed it, he knew, during these bad days. Possibly one of the fathers or big brothers would come this afternoon and he could supply them with grain. It was just a matter of carrying them over

to the next harvest. Now shiploads of wheat were arriving from France and the worst was over. But it would be hard to forget that poverty, that army of ragged ghosts wandering in the sunlight, the plateaus burned to a cinder month after month, the earth shrivelled up little by little, literally scorched, every stone bursting into dust under one's foot. The sheep had died then by thousands and even a few men, here and there, sometimes without anyone's knowing.

In contrast with such poverty, he who lived almost like a monk in his remote schoolhouse, nonetheless satisfied with the little he had and with the rough life, had felt like a lord with his whitewashed walls, his narrow couch, his unpainted shelves, his well, and his weekly provision of water and food. And suddenly this snow, without warning, without the foretaste of rain. This is the way the region was, cruel to live in, even without men-who didn't help matters either. But Daru had been born here. Everywhere else, he felt exiled.

He stepped out onto the terrace in front of the schoolhouse. The two men were now halfway up the slope. He recognized the horseman as Balducci, the old gendarme he had known for a long time. Balducci was holding on the end of a rope an Arab who was walking behind him with hands bound and head lowered. The gendarme waved a greeting to which Daru did not reply, lost as he was in contemplation of the Arab dressed in a faded blue jellaba, his feet in sandals but covered with socks of heavy raw wool, his head surmounted by a narrow, short *chèche*. They were approaching. Balducci was holding back his horse in order not to hurt the Arab, and the group was advancing slowly.

Within earshot, Balducci shouted: 'One hour to do the three kilometres from El Ameur!' Daru did not answer. Short and square in his thick sweater, he watched them climb. Not once had the Arab raised his head. 'Hello,' said Daru when they got up onto the terrace. 'Come in and warm up.' Balducci painfully got down from his horse without letting go the rope. From under his bristling moustache he smiled at the schoolmaster. His little dark eyes, deepset under a tanned forehead, and his mouth surrounded with wrinkles made him look attentive and studious. Daru took the bridle, led the horse to the shed, and came back to the two men who were now waiting for him in the school. He led them into his room. 'I am going to heat up the classroom,' he said. 'We'll be more comfortable there.' When he entered the room again, Balducci was on the couch. He had undone the rope tying him to the Arab, who had squatted near the

stove. His hands still bound, the cheche pushed back on his head, he was looking toward the window. At first Daru noticed only his huge lips, fat, smooth almost Negroid: yet his nose was straight, his eyes were dark and full of fever. The chèche revealed an obstinate forehead and, under the weathered skin now rather discoloured by the cold, the whole face had a restless and rebellious look that struck Daru when the Arab, turning his face toward him, looked him straight in the eyes. 'Go, into the other room,' said the schoolmaster, 'and I'll make you some mint tea.' 'Thanks,' Balducci said. 'What a chore! How I long for retirement.' And addressing his prisoner in Arabic: 'Come on, you.' The Arab got up and, slowly, holding his bound wrists in front of him, went into the classroom.

With the tea, Daru brought a chair. But Balducci was already enthroned on the nearest pupil's desk and the Arab had squatted against the teacher's platform facing the stove, which stood between the desk and the window. When he held out the glass of tea to the prisoner, Daru hesitated at the sight of his bound hands. 'He might perhaps be untied.' 'Sure,' said Balducci. 'That was for the trip.' He started to get to his feet. But Daru, setting the glass on the floor, had knelt beside the Arab. Without saying anything, the Arab watched him with his feverish eyes. Once his hands were free, he rubbed his swollen wrists against each other, took the glass of tea, and sucked up the burning liquid in swift little sips.

'Good,' said Daru. 'And where are you headed?'

Balducci withdrew his moustache from the tea. 'Here, son.'

'Odd pupils! And you're spending the night?'

'No. I'm going back to El Ameur. And you will deliver this fellow to Tinguit. He is expected at police headquarters.'

Balducci was looking at Daru with a friendly little smile.

'What's this story?' asked the schoolmaster. 'Are you pulling my leg?'

'No, son. Those are the orders.'

'The orders? I'm not … 'Daru hesitated, not wanting to hurt the old Corsican. 'I mean, that's not my job.'

'What! What's the meaning of that? In wartime people do all kinds of jobs.'

'Then I'll wait for the declaration of war!'

Balducci nodded.

'O.K. But the orders exist and they concern you too. Things are brewing, it appears. There is talk of a forthcoming revolt. We are

mobilized, in a way.'

Daru still had his obstinate look.

'Listen, son,' Balducci said. 'I like you and you must understand. There's only a dozen of us at El Ameur to patrol throughout the whole territory of a small department and I must get back in a hurry. I was told to hand this guy over to you and return without delay. He couldn't be kept there. His village was beginning to stir; they wanted to take him back. You must take him to Tinguit tomorrow before the day is over. Twenty kilometres shouldn't faze a husky fellow like you. After that, all will be over. You'll come back to your pupils and your comfortable life.'

Behind the wall the horse could be heard snorting and pawing the earth. Daru was looking out the window. Decidedly, the weather was clearing and the light was increasing over the snowy plateau. When all the snow was melted, the sun would take over again and once more would burn the field of stone. For days, still, the unchanging sky would shed its dry light on the solitary expanse where nothing had any connection with man.

'After all,' he said, turning around toward Balducci, 'what did he do?' And, before the gendarme had opened his mouth, he asked: 'Does he speak French?'

'No, not a word. We had been looking for him for a month, but they were hiding him. He killed his cousin.'

'Is he against us?'

'I don't think so. But you can never be sure.'

'Why did he kill?'

'A family squabble, I think. One owed the other grain, it seems. It's not at all clear. In short, he killed his cousin with a billhook. You know, like a sheep, *kreezk*!'

Balducci made the gesture of drawing a blade across his throat and the Arab, his attention attracted, watched him with a sort of anxiety. Daru felt a sudden wrath against the man, against all men with their rotten spite, their tireless hates, their blood lust.

But the kettle was singing on the stove. He served Balducci more tea, hesitated, then served the Arab again, who, a second time, drank avidly. His raised arms made the jellaba fall open and the schoolmaster saw his thin, muscular chest.

'Thanks, kid' Balducci said. 'And now, I'm off.'

He got up and went toward the Arab, taking a small rope from his pocket.

'What are you doing?' Daru asked dryly.
Balducci, disconcerted, showed him the rope.
'Don't bother.'
The old gendarme hesitated. 'It's up to you. Of course, you are armed?'

'I have my shotgun.'

'Where?'

'In the trunk.'

'You ought to have it near your bed.'

'Why? I have nothing to fear.'

'You're crazy, son. If there's an uprising, no one is safe, we're all in the same boat.'

'I'll defend myself. I'll have time to see them coming.' Balducci began to laugh, then suddenly the moustache covered the white teeth.

'You'll have time? O.K. That's just what I was saying. You have always been a little cracked. That's why I like you, my son was like that.'

At the same time he took out his revolver and put it on the desk.

'Keep it; I don't need two weapons from here to El Ameur.' The revolver shone against the black paint of the table. When the gendarme turned toward him, the schoolmaster caught the smell of leather and horseflesh.

'Listen, Balducci,' Daru said suddenly, 'every bit of this disgusts me, and first of all your fellow here. But I won't hand him over. Fight, yes, if I have to. But not that.'

The old gendarme stood in front of him and looked at him severely.

'You're being a fool,' he said slowly. 'I don't like it either. You don't get used to putting a rope on a man even after years of it, and you're even ashamed-yes, ashamed. But you can't let them have their way.'

'I won't hand him over,' Daru said again.

'It's an order, son, and I repeat it.'

'That's right. Repeat to them what I've said to you: I won't hand him over.'

Balducci made a visible effort to reflect. He looked at the Arab and at Daru. At last he decided.

'No, I won't tell them anything. If you want to drop us, go ahead; I'll not denounce you. I have an order to deliver the prisoner

and I'm doing so. And now you'll just sign this paper for me.'

'There's no need. I'll not deny that you left him with me.'

'Don't be mean with me, I know you'll tell the truth. You're from hereabouts and you are a man. But you must sign, that's the rule.'

Daru opened his drawer, took out a little square bottle of purple ink, the red wooden penholder with the 'sergeant-major' pen he used for making models of penmanship, and signed. The gendarme carefully folded the paper and put it into his wallet. Then he moved toward the door.

'I'll see you off,' Daru said.

'No,' said Balducci. 'There's no use being polite. You insulted me.'

He looked at the Arab, motionless in the same spot, sniffed peevishly, and turned away toward the door. 'Good-bye, son,' he said. The door shut behind him. Balducci appeared suddenly outside the window and then disappeared. His footsteps were muffled by the snow. The horse stirred on the other side of the wall and several chickens fluttered in fright. A moment later Balducci reappeared outside the window leading the horse by the bridle. He walked toward the little rise without turning around and disappeared from sight with the horse following him. A big stone could be heard bouncing down. Daru walked back toward the prisoner, who, without stirring, never took his eyes off him. 'Wait,' the schoolmaster said in Arabic and went toward the bedroom. As he was going through the door, he had a second thought, went to the desk, took the revolver, and stuck it in his pocket. Then, without looking back, he went into his room.

For some time he lay on his couch watching the sky gradually close over, listening to the silence. It was this silence that had seemed painful to him during the first days here, after the war. He had requested a post in the little town at the base of the foothills separating the upper plateaus from the desert. There, rocky walls, green and black to the north, pink and lavender to the south, marked the frontier of eternal summer. He had been named to a post farther north, on the plateau itself. In the beginning, the solitude and the silence had been hard for him on these wastelands peopled only by stones. Occasionally, furrows suggested cultivation, but they had been dug to uncover a certain kind of stone good for building. The only ploughing here was to harvest rocks. Elsewhere a thin layer of soil accumulated in the hollows would be scraped out to enrich paltry

village gardens. This is the way it was: bare rock covered three quarters of the region. Towns sprang up, flourished, then disappeared; men came by, loved one another or fought bitterly, then died. No one in this desert, neither he nor his guest, mattered. And yet, outside this desert neither of them, Daru knew, could have really lived.

When he got up, no noise came from the classroom. He was amazed at the unmixed joy he derived from the mere thought that the Arab might have fled and that he would be alone with no decision to make. But the prisoner was there. He had merely stretched out between the stove and the desk. With eyes open, he was staring at the ceiling. In that position, his thick lips were particularly noticeable, giving him a pouting look. 'Come,' said Daru. The Arab got up and followed him. In the bedroom, the schoolmaster pointed to a chair near the table under the window. The Arab sat down without taking his eyes off Daru.

'Are you hungry?'

'Yes,' the prisoner said.

Daru set the table for two. He took flour and oil, shaped a cake in a frying-pan, and lighted the little stove that functioned on bottled gas. While the cake was cooking, he went out to the shed to get cheese, eggs, dates, and condensed milk. When the cake was done he set it on the window sill to cool, heated some condensed milk diluted with water, and beat up the eggs into an omelette. In one of his motions he knocked against the revolver stuck in his right pocket. He set the bowl down, went into the classroom, and put the revolver in his desk drawer. When he came back to the room, night was falling. He put on the light and served the Arab. 'Eat,' he said. The Arab took a piece of the cake, lifted it eagerly to his mouth, and stopped short.

'And you?' he asked.

'After you. I'll eat too.'

The thick lips opened slightly. The Arab hesitated, then bit into the cake determinedly.

The meal over, the Arab looked at the schoolmaster. 'Are you the judge?'

'No, I'm simply keeping you until tomorrow.'

'Why do you eat with me?'

'I'm hungry.'

The Arab fell silent. Daru got up and went out. He brought back a folding bed from the shed, set it up between the table and the

stove, perpendicular to his own bed. From a large suitcase which, upright in a corner, served as a shelf for papers, he took two blankets and arranged them on the camp bed. Then he stopped, felt useless, and sat down on his bed. There was nothing more to do or to get ready. He had to look at this man. He looked at him, therefore, trying to imagine his face bursting with rage. He couldn't do so. He could see nothing but the dark yet shining eyes and the animal mouth.

'Why did you kill him?' he asked in a voice whose hostile tone surprised him.

The Arab looked away.

'He ran away. I ran after him.'

He raised his eyes to Daru again and they were full of a sort of woeful interrogation. 'Now what will they do to me?'

'Are you afraid?'

He stiffened, turning his eyes away.

'Are you sorry?'

The Arab stared at him openmouthed. Obviously he did not understand. Daru's annoyance was growing. At the same time he felt awkward and self-conscious with his big body wedged between the two beds.

'Lie down there,' he said impatiently. 'That's your bed.'

The Arab didn't move. He called to Daru:

'Tell me!'

The schoolmaster looked at him.

'Is the gendarme coming back tomorrow?'

'I don't know.'

'Are you coming with us?'

'I don't know. Why?'

The prisoner got up and stretched out on top of the blankets, his feet toward the window. The light from the electric bulb shone straight into his eyes and he closed them at once.

'Why?' Daru repeated, standing beside the bed.

The Arab opened his eyes under the blinding light and looked at him, trying not to blink.

'Come with us,' he said.

In the middle of the night, Daru was still not asleep. He had gone to bed after undressing completely; he generally slept naked. But when he suddenly realized that he had nothing on, he hesitated. He felt vulnerable and the temptation came to him to put his clothes back on. Then he shrugged his shoulders; after all, he wasn't a child

and, if need be, he could break his adversary in two. From his bed he could observe him, lying on his back, still motionless with his eyes closed under the harsh light. When Daru turned out the light, the darkness seemed to coagulate all of a sudden. Little by little, the night came back to life in the window where the starless sky was stirring gently. The schoolmaster soon made out the body lying at his feet. The Arab still did not move, but his eyes seemed open. A faint wind was prowling around the schoolhouse. Perhaps it would drive away the clouds and the sun would reappear.

During the night the wind increased. The hens fluttered a little and then were silent. The Arab turned over on his side with his back to Daru, who thought he heard him moan. Then he listened for his guest's breathing, become heavier and more regular. He listened to that breath so close to him and mused without being able to go to sleep. In this room where he had been sleeping alone for a year, this presence bothered him. But it bothered him also by imposing on him a sort of brotherhood he knew well but refused to accept in the present circumstances. Men who share the same rooms, soldiers or prisoners, develop a strange alliance as if, having cast off their armour with their clothing, they fraternized every evening, over and above their differences, in the ancient community of dream and fatigue. But Daru shook himself; he didn't like such musings, and it was essential to sleep.

A little later, however, when the Arab stirred slightly, the schoolmaster was still not asleep. When the prisoner made a second move, he stiffened, on the alert. The Arab was lifting himself slowly on his arms with almost the motion of a sleepwalker. Seated upright in bed, he waited motionless without turning his head toward Daru, as if he were listening attentively. Daru did not stir; it had just occurred to him that the revolver was still in the drawer of his desk. It was better to act at once. Yet he continued to observe the prisoner, who, with the same slithery motion, put his feet on the ground, waited again, then began to stand up slowly. Daru was about to call out to him when the Arab began to walk, in a quite natural but extraordinarily silent way. He was heading toward the door at the end of the room that opened into the shed. He lifted the latch with precaution and went out, pushing the door behind him but without shutting it. Daru had not stirred. 'He is running away,' he merely thought. 'Good riddancel' Yet he listened attentively. The hens were not fluttering; the guest must be on the plateau. A faint sound of water reached

him, and he didn't know what it was until the Arab again stood framed in the doorway, closed the door carefully, and came back to bed without a sound. Then Daru turned his back on him and fell asleep. Still later he seemed, from the depths of his sleep, to hear "furtive steps around the schoolhouse. 'I'm dreaming! I'm dreaming!' he repeated to himself. And he went on sleeping.

When he awoke, the sky was clear; the loose window let in a cold, pure air. The Arab was asleep, hunched up under the blankets now, his mouth open, utterly relaxed. But when Daru shook him, he started dreadfully, staring at Daru with wild eyes as if he had never seen him and such a frightened expression that the schoolmaster stepped buck 'Don't be afraid. It's me. You must eat.' The Arab nodded his head and said yes. Calm had returned to his face, but his expression was vacant and listless.

The coffee was ready. They drank it seated together on the folding bed as they munched their pieces of the cake. Then Daru led the Arab under the shed and showed him the faucet where he washed. He went back into the room, folded the blankers and the bed, made his own bed and put the room in order. Then he went through the classroom and out onto the terrace. The sun was already rising in the blue sky; a soft, bright light was bathing the deserted plateau. On the ridge the snow was melting in spots. The stones were about to reappear. Crouched on the edge of the plateau, the schoolmaster looked at the deserted expanst. He thought of Balducci. He had hurt him, for he had sent him off in a way as if he didn't want to be associated with him. He could still hear the gendarme's farewell and, without knowing why, he felt strangely empty and vulnerable. At that moment, from the other side of the schoolhouse, the prisoner coughed. Daru listened to him almost despite himself and then, furious, threw a pebble that whistled through the air before sinking into the snow. That man's stupid crime revolted him, but to hand him over was contrary tochonour. Merely thinking of it made him smart with humiliation. And he cursed at one and the same time his own people who had sent him this Arab and the Arab too who had dared to kill and not managed to get away. Daru got up, walked in a circle on the terrace, waited motionless, and then went back into the schoolhouse.

The Arab, leaning over the cement floor of the shed, was washing his teeth with two fingers. Daru looked at him and said 'Come.' He went back into the room ahead of the prisoner. He slipped a hunting-jacket

on over his sweater and put on walking-shoes. Standing, he waited until the Arab liad put on his *cheche* and sandals. They went into the classroom and the schoolmaster pointed to the exit, saying: 'Go ahead.' The fellow didn't budge. 'I'm coming,' said Daru. The Arab went out. Daru went back into the room and made a package of pieces of rusk, dates, and sugar. In the classroom, before going out, he hesitated a second in front of his desk, then crossed the threshold and locked the door. 'That's the way,' he said. He started toward the east, followed by the prisoner. But, a short distance from the schoolhouse, he thought he heard a slight sound behind them. He retraced his steps and examined the surroundings of the house; there was no one there. The Arab watched him without seeming to understand. 'Come on,' said Daru.

They walked for an hour and rested beside a sharp peak of limestone. The snow was melting faster and faster and the sun was drinking up the puddles at once, rapidly cleaning the plateau, which gradually dried and vibrated like the air itself. When they resumed walking, the ground rang under their feet. From time to time a bird sent the space in front of them with a joyful cry. Daru breathed in deeply the tresh morning light. He felt a sort of rapture before the vast familiar expanse, now almost entirely yellow under its dome of blue sky. They walked an hour more, descending toward the south. They reached a level height made up of crumbly locks. From there on, the plateau sloped down, eastward, toward a low plain where there were a few spindly trees and, to the south, toward outcroppings of rock that gave the landscape a chaotic look.

Daru surveyed the two directions. There was nothing but the sky on the horizon. Not a man could be seen. He turned toward the Arab, who was looking at him blankly. Daru held out the package to him. 'Take it,' he said. 'There are dates, bread, and sugar. You can hold out for two days. Here are a thousand francs too.' The Arab took the package and the money but kept his full hands at chest level as if he didn't know what to do with what was being given him. 'Now look,' the schoolmaster said as he pointed in the direction of the east, 'there's the way to Tinguit. You have a two-hour walk. At Tinguit you'll find the administration and the police. They are expecting you.' The Arab looked toward the east still holding the package and the money against his chest. Daru took his elbow and tuned him rather roughly toward the south. At the foot of the height on which they stood could be seen a faint path. That's the trail across the plateau. In a day's walk from here you'll find pasturelands and the first nomads. They'll take you in and shelter you according to their

law.' The Arab had now turned toward Daru and a sort of panic was visible in his expression. 'Listen,' he said. Daru shook his head: 'No, be quiet. Now I'm leaving you.' He turned his back on him, took two long steps in the direction of the school, looked hesitantly at the motionless Arab, and started off again. For a few minutes he heard nothing but his own step resounding on the cold ground and did not turn his head. A moment later, however he turned around. The Arab was still there on the edge of the hill, his arms hanging now, and the was looking at the schoolmaster Daru felt something rise in his throat. But he swore with impatient,waved vaguely, and started off again. He had already gone some distance when he again stopped and looked. There was no longer anyone on the hill.

Daru hesitated. The sun was now rather high in the sky and was beginning to beat down on his head. The schoolmaster retraced his steps, at first somewhat uncertainly, then with decision. When he reached the little hill, he was bathed in sweat. He climbed it as fast as he could and stopped, out of breath, at the top. The rock-fields to the south stood out sharply against the blue sky, but on the plain to the east a steamy heat was already rising. And in that slight haze, Daru, with heavy heart, made out the Arab walking slowly on the road to prison.

A little later, standing before the window of the classroom, the schoolmaster was watching the clear light bathing the whole surface of the plateau, but he hardly saw it. Behind him on the blackboard, among the winding French rivers, sprawled the clumsily chalked-up words he had just read: 'You handed over our brother. You will pay for this!' Daru looked at the sky, the plateau, and, beyond, the invisible lands stretching all the way to the sea. In this vast landscape he had loved so much, he was alone.

*Translated from French by Justin O'Brien*

## Questions for Discussion

1. What unusual predicament does Daru face in 'The Guest'? How does it present a moral problem to him?

2. Is 'The Guest' a story that explores the themes of confinement and flight? Where does this exploration take the reader?

3. Comment on the setting of Camus's "The Guest'. How does the setting contribute to the ethical dilemma faced by Daru?

4. Does the Arab act as a perfect foil to Daru in 'The Guest'? Explain at some length.

UNIT NINE

# The Greatcoat

## Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol

**About the author** Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol (1809-1852) was among the most influential Russian writers of modern literature who wrote novels, plays, and short fiction. To many readers outside Soviet Russia, Gogol is known as the preeminent writer of such stories as 'The Nose', and 'The Greatcoat'-the two Petersburg tales of fantasy and realism respectively. Both are major influences on the development of modern Russian and continental fiction.

**About the story** 'The Greatcoat' (1842) is the story of Akaky Akakievich Bashmachkin, a poor clerk in the St. Petersburg civil service. Gogol is best remembered today for the unusual perceptions his narrators weave into the details of mood and atmosphere of the narrative. Quite apart from what the story of Akaky is, the reader is constantly struck by the acute power of observation, commentary, and sensitivity the voice brings to bear on the narrative. This is a difficult task. While following the story (what happens to Akaky), we are also interested in *how* the story is told. Gogol thus succeeds in sustaining this interest in the *art* of story-telling.

The narrator of 'The Greatcoat' is not a character in the story. There are, however, suggestions that he (presumably a man ?) knows everything. He tells the story in the first person. This person also begins to assume a clear and distinct identity in the course of the narrative. We are apt to confuse the narrator with Gogol, the 'author' of 'The Greatcoat'. Refer to the following sections:

1. In the department of ... but I think we'd better not say in which department exactly. (p.52)

2. Where exactly the official lived ... I cannot unfortunately say: my memory is starting to let us down badly ... (p.68) ]

3. ... may be he [Akakievich] was not thinking this at all-after all, you cannot see into the mind of another person and discover

what he is thinking. (p.69

4. … as for the way he spent the night there, we shall leave that up to the imagination of the reader who can put himself in someone else's shoes. (p.72)

5. Who got it all [who inherited what Akaky left behind] God only knows: and I must confess that the present narrator story has made no attempt to find out. (p.78)

6. It so happened that our bleak story had an unexpected and fantastic ending.(p.78)

**In the department of … but I think we'd better not say in which department exactly. For all these departments, regiments, chancellories-in a word, all estates of government service are the most bad-tempered lot. Nowadays private citizens take any insult addressed to them personally as an insult against society as a whole. There is a story that recently a complaint was received from the police inspector of some town or other, in which he declared in no uncertain terms that all the state's institutions were going to the dogs and that his own sacred name was most decidedly being taken in vain. As proof he appended to his petition a massive volume containing some romantic composition, in which every ten pages a police inspector was featured, sometimes in a state of complete inebriation. Thus, to avoid any such unpleasantnesses we had best call the department with which we are concerned *a certain department*. Thus, *in a certain department there served a certain official;* the official cannot be described as very remarkable; he was shortish, somewhat pockmarked, with somewhat reddish hair, apparently with somewhat less than perfect eyesight, with a somewhat receding hairline, wrinkles on both sides of his cheeks and of what might be called a haemorrhoidal complexion … Well, it can't be helped! St. Petersburg's climate is to blame. As for rank (and with us rank is the first thing that has to be declared), he was of the genus: eternal Titular Councillor, who, as the reader will know are the butt of wit and mockery of many a writer, given to the commendable habit of hitting out at those who cannot hit back. The official's surname was Bashmachkin. From which it can be seen that the name originates from bashmack, a shoe; but when, at what time and in what manner this derivation**

From which it can be seen that the name originates from bashmack, a shoe; but when, at what time and in what manner this derivation from a shoe came about we cannot say. Both his father and his grandfather, and even his brother-in-law, indeed absolutely all the Bashmachkins went about in boots, never changing them and only having them resoled three times a year. His first name and patronymic were Akaky Akakievich. This may strike the reader as somewhat strange and affected, but I can assure him that no affectation entered into its selection, and that the very circumstances of his naming were such that no other name was possible. It all happened like this. Akaky Akakievich was born in the night of, if my memory does not deceive me, March the 22nd. His late mother, herself the wife of an official and a very fine woman, resolved to christen the child in the proper manner. The mother was still lying in her bed opposite the door, with the godfather on her left, an excellent gentleman, Ivan Ivanovich Yeroshkin, a head clerk in the Senate, and the godmother, wife of a police officer, a woman of rare virtues, Arina Semyonovna Belobryushkova. The new mother was given the choice of three names: Mokkey, Sossy, or after the martyr Khozdazat. 'No,' thought the good lady, 'those aren't the right sort of names.' To appease her the calendar was opened at another page, and once again three names were proposed: Trifilly, Dula and Varakhasy. 'This is my punishment,' announced the old lady, 'all such odd names, I can't say I've ever heard the like before. Varadat or even Varukh would be one thing, but not Trifilly and Varakhasy.' They turned to yet another page and were confronted by Pavsikakhy and Vakhtisy. 'No, it is clear to me now,' said the old lady, 'that this is the hand of density. Better let him take his father's name. His father was Akaky, so let the son be Akaky too.' Thus did he acquire the name Akaky Akakievich. The child was duly christened, and in the process he started crying and pulled such a face as if he were having premonitions of one day becoming a titular councillor. So now you know how all this came to pass. We have made this digression in order that the reader might see for himself that his was a matter of sheer necessity and it would have been quite impossible to give him any other name. When and at what age he entered the department and who appointed him no one would now be able to say. Directors came and went, superintendents succeeded superintendents, but he remained in the very same spot, in the very same position, in the very same job, a humble copying clerk; so that afterwards people swore that he must have been born

into the world in exactly that state, complete with uniform and receding hairline. Absolutely no respect whatever was accorded him in the department. The porters not only did not rise to their feet when he walked past, they even did not look at him; he could have been a fly flitting through the reception hall. His superiors acted towards him in a cold and despotic manner. An assistant head clerk would thrust papers under his nose, without even bothering to say, 'Copy this lot', or 'Here's a nice, interesting little job', or something friendly as is usual in more civil establishments. He would take them, looking only at the papers, noticing neither who had given them to him, nor whether they had the right to do so. He would take them and at once set about copying them. The young officials would mock him and make fun at his expense, to the limits of their clerkish wit, relating all sorts of fictitious stories about him in his presence, about his landlady, a woman in her seventies, saying that she beat him, asking when their marriage was to take place, tearing up paper and throwing it over his head like confetti. Akaky Akakievich would not counter this with a single word, acting as if there were no one before him; it did not have any effect on his work: in the midst of all these pranks he would not make even a single error in his copying. Only if the fun got quite out of hand, when his arm was jogged, preventing him from continuing his work, would he protest: 'Leave me alone, why do you torment me?' And there was something strange about his words, and about the tone of voice in which they were spoken. They contained something verging on the pathetic, which caused one young man of recent appointment, who followed the other's example in poking fun at him, suddenly to stop dead in his tracks, and henceforth to see all and everything around him in a different light. Some unnatural force thrust him away from his new friends, whom he had taken to be decent, cultivated people. And for a long time after that, in times of great merriment, he would recall this downbent clerk with a receding hairline and his penetrating words: 'Leave me alone, why do you torment me?' and in these words he could hear another message: 'I am your brother.' At these moments the poor young man would cover his face with his hands. Many a time during his life did he shudder at the sight of man's cruelty to man, at the vicious coarseness concealed behind a refined, educated and civilized veneer and, Lord! even in those whom the world has recognized as noble and honest.

You would scarcely have found another who so punctiliously carried out his duties. It was not merely that he served with diligence, nay, he served with love. In his work, his copying, he could see a world that was colourful and attractive His face would take on an expression of pleasure; certain letters of the alphabet he particularly favoured and if he encountered them he would be quite beside himself: he would chuckle and wink and mouth sounds, so that it was possible to read in his face every letter described by his pen. Had he been suitably rewarded for his zeal he might well have become-to his great astonishment-a state councillor; but all his reward, as his witty workmates put it, was a badge on his front side and piles on his backside. However, it cannot truthfully be said that absolutely no attention was given him! One director, by nature a kind man who wished to reward him for his long service, gave orders that he be given something more important to do than the usual copying; namely, he was ordered to write a report of a completed case for another office; all the task involved was changing the heading and shifting the odd verb from the first to the third person. This was such hard work for him that he broke into a terrible sweat, mopped his brow and finally announced: 'No, better give me something to copy.' After that he was left as a simple copy-clerk. Outside this copying there seemed to be no other world for him. He did not attend at all to his dress: his uniform was no longer green, but a sort of mottled rust. Its collar was low and narrow, so that his neck, although of medium length, stuck out and looked extraordinarily long, like the necks of these plaster-of-Paris kittens with nodding heads that foreign hawkers carry in baskets on their heads. And there would always be something sticking to his uniform: either a piece of straw or a thread; furthermore he was particularly into the world in exactly that state, complete with uniform and receding hairline. Absolutely no respect whatever was accorded him in the department. The porters not only did not rise to their feet when he walked past, they even did not look at him; he could have adept, when walking along the street, at passing under windows when slops and rubbish were being thrown out of them, and thus he invariably carried on his hat bits of rind and melon skins and similar refuse. Not once in his life had he paid any attention to the daily happenings and goings-on in the street, which are always so carefully observed by his young colleagues in the service, who have so sharpened the keenness of alert glance that they will even notice

someone on the other side of the street who has allowed his stirrup-strap to come loose-an oversight that is sure to evoke a scornful smile on their faces.

But when Akaky Akakievich ever looked at anything he only saw all about him the even lines described in his neat hand, and only if some passing horse should happen to thrust its nose over his shoulder and emit a blast of horsy breath through its nostrils onto his cheeks would he perhaps notice that he was in the middle of the street and not the middle of a line of his copying. On his arrival home he would at once seat himself at the table, tuck into his soup and eat a piece of beef with onions, quite oblivious to their taste, complete with flies and whatever else the good Lord saw fit to provide. When he felt his stomach starting to swell he would rise from the table, fetch an ink-well and set about copying the papers he had brought home. Should there be no such papers, he would make a copy for himself, for the sheer pleasure of it, and particularly should the document be notable-not for the eloquence of its style, but for the novelty or importance of its addressee.

Even at that hour when the grey sky of St. Petersburg is shrouded in total darkness and all its race of officials have dined and sated themselves, each in their own way, in accordance with their means and culinary preferences, when the clerkdom of St. Petersburg are resting from their daily scratching of pens, from the fuss and bustle of their own and other departments and from all the extra and unnecessary work voluntarily undertaken by all those of a restless disposition, when the officials are hastening to devote their remaining free time to pleasurable pursuits: the more enterprising dashing to the theatre, some roaming the streets, peeking under the ladies' natty bonnets, some passing the evening addressing compliments to some attractive maiden, the star of a small constellation of officials, some, and this is their most common occupation simply, setting off to a colleague's third or fourth-floor flat, where he occupies two small rooms and a hall or kitchen sporting certain fashionable pretensions, a lamp or some other knick-knack, obtained at the cost of many a sacrificed dinner and night on the town; in other words even at the time when all officials disperse around the small flats of their friends to play storm whist, sipping tea out of glasses and eating cheap rusks, drawing on long church-warden pipes, and relaying during the dealing some slander picked up from high society, which the average Russian always and in whatever state finds totally irresistible,

or even, when there is nothing else to talk about, retelling the age-old joke about the commandant who is informed that the tail of the horse on Falconet's monument has been docked-that is to say, even at that time when the rest of the world is looking for entertainment Akaky Akakievich would not permit himself any such frivolity. No one could say that they had ever seen him at a party. Having sated himself with the pleasures of copying, he would go to the age-old joke about the commandant who is informed that the tail of the horse on Falconet's monument has been docked-that is to say, even at that time when the rest of the world is looking for entertainment Akaky Akakievich would not permit himself any such frivolity. No one could say that they had ever seen him at a party. Having sated himself with the pleasures of copying, he would go to send him to copy. Such was the peaceful life led by a man who with a salary of four hundred rubles was able to be content with his lot, and such would it have continued, perhaps, to a hoary old age, were it not for certain disasters which lie in store not only for titular, but even privy, state, aulic and all other councillors, and even for those who neither give nor take counsel of any sort.

All those who receive a salary of four hundred or thereabouts have a fierce enemy in St. Petersburg. This enemy is none other than our northern frost, although you also hear it said that it is good for the health. At eight in the morning, the very hour when the streets fill with clerks scurrying to their departments, it goes to work, delivering such mighty and stinging fillips on all noses that the wretched clerks desperately seek some way of concealing them. At such times, when even those in senior positions feel the skin on their faces tightening with cold and tears springing to their eyes, the poor titular councillors are utterly defenceless. The only chance of survival is to dash four or five blocks at top speed in their thin, threadbare overcoats, until they reach the haven of the porters lodge, where they stamp their feet until all their frozen talents and clerkly capabilities have thawed out. There came a time when Akaky Akakievich started to feel particularly sharp stabs of cold in his back and shoulders, despite the speed at which he endeavoured to scurry across the necessary distance. He finally wondered whether there may not be any faults in his overcoat. Examining it carefully at home he discovered that in two or three places, namely on the back and shoulders, it had worn as thin as sack cloth, becoming quite transparent, while beneath it the lining had shredded away. We should observe here that Akaky Akakievich's

coat also served as the butt of this fellow clerk's humour; they had even stripped it of its name of overcoat and dubbed it his smock. In fact it was rather strange to look at: its collar became smaller and smaller every year as it was used to make new hems for the coat. These repairs did not do great credit to the art of the tailor and were baggy and awkwardly done. Thus divining the source of the problem, Akaky Akakievich resolved that the coat had to be taken to Petrovich the tailor, who resided somewhere on the fourth floor of a back staircase, and who, despite his squint and pockmarked face, was rather deft at repairing the trousers and tailcoats of officials and other clients, deft, that is, when he was sober and his attention not taken up with the some other undertaking. We do not really need to say very much about this tailor, but as it is now customary in stories to give a full description of the character of each of the dramatis personae there is nothing for it but to have a close look at Petrovich too. Originally he was simply called Grigory and was the serf of some landowner; he took the name Petrovich when he received his release and started to drink rather liberally on saints' days, first on only the big holidays, but then indiscriminately, wherever the day was marked a cross in the calendar. In this respect he was true to our ancestral habits, and in quarrels with his wife would call her a godless woman and a German. And since we have now brought his wife into the picture we will also have to say a couple of words about her; unfortunately not much was known about her. It was only known that Petrovich had a wife, who even wore a lace cap rather than a headscarf; it appeared, however, that she could not boast of great beauty; at any rate, of the men who walked past her only guardsmen would look beneath the brim of her cap, giving a twitch of their moustaches and making a strange noise.

As he ascended the staircase leading to Petrovich's shop, a staircase which, to be perfectly truthful, was thoroughly anointed with slops, and everywhere gave off that acrid smell that so stings the eyes and which, as the reader will know, is an inevitable concomitant of all back staircases in St. Petersburg-as he ascended the staircase Akaky Akakievich was already speculating how much Petrovich would ask and inwardly resolved to pay no more than two rubles. The door was open, because the tailor's good wife had produced so much smoke in the kitchen in the process of cooking some fish, that you could not even see the cockroaches. Akaky Akakievich walked through the kitchen, unobserved by the tailor's wife and finally made

his way into the workroom where he saw Petrovich sitting on a big unpainted wooden table with his feet tucked beneath him like a Turkish pasha. His feet were bare, as is usual with tailors when they are seated at their work. The most prominent feature on them was his big toe, familiar to Akaky Akakievich, with its mangled nail, as thick and tough as tortoise shell. Hanging round his neck Petrovich had a skein of silk and cotton thread and on his knees some scraps of cloth. For the last three minutes he had been trying unsuccessfully to thread a needle and was consequently very angry at the darkness in the room and at the thread itself, and was muttering away: 'Go in, damn you! It's enough to drive you mad, the scoundrell' It was upsetting to Akaky Akakievich that he should have come in at a moment when Petrovich was angry: he preferred to make his orders when Petrovich was feeling mellow, or, as his wife would say, when 'he's been hitting the bottle again, the one-eyed devil'. In this state Petrovich would usually be quite amenable to his clients' requests, agreeing with deep bows and expressions of gratitude. Later, admittedly, his wife would come complaining that her husband had been drunk and therefore agreed to do the work too cheaply; but usually you would only have to add another ten kopecks and the job was in the bag. Now, however, Petrovich appeared to be quite sober, and therefore abrupt, intractable and likely to demand diabolical prices. Akaky Akakievich quickly took stock of the situation and would have liked to beat a hasty retreat but it was too late. Petrovich directed his good eye at him with a fixed stare and Akaky Akakievich automatically pronounced: 'Goodday, Petrovich!' to which the latter replied 'Goodday to you, sir!' fixing his eye on Akaky Akakievich's hand, to see what sort of booty he was being brought.

'I er … just called in, Petrovich, this here … '

At this stage we should point out that Akaky Akakievich expressed himself for the most part with the use of prepositions, adverbs and all sorts of particles which do not actually mean anything. If the situation was particularly awkward he would not even complete his sentences at all, and frequently, after saying something like: 'Well, you see … it's actually … ' he would trail off, under the impression that he had said all he intended to say.

'What is it?' asked Petrovich, studying his uniform carefully with his good eye, starting from the collar and proceeding to the sleeves, the back, the skirts and buttonholes, all of it being only too familiar to him, as it was all his own work. Such is the custom of tailors and

the first thing they do on encountering a client.

'Well, it's like this, Petrovich … this coat of mine, the cloth … you see, it's quite strong in other places, it's just a bit dusty and looks sort of old, but it's actually new, only here in this one place it's a little sort of … on the back, and on one shoulder … it's a little worn, and here on this shoulder, too … there, you see, that's all. Not much work at all, really …'

Petrovich took the 'smock', spread it out on the table, studied it carefully, shook his head and leaned across to the windowsill for a round snuff-box with the portrait of some general, it is not clear which one exactly, because someone had poked his finger through the place where the head had been painted and the hole had been covered with a square piece of paper. Taking a pinch of snuff Petrovich stretched the coat out on his hands and held it up against the light. Once again he shook his head. Then he turned up its lining and shook his head again, and once again reached for the snuff-box and removed the lid with the portrait of a general, covered with a piece of paper, placing a pinch of snuff in his nostril, replaced the lid, put away the box and finally announced:

'No, it can't be fixed: the garment's worn out!'

Akaky Akakievich's heart sank at these words.

'But why can't it, Petrovich?' he said, in an almost childish, pleading voice: 'I mean it's really on the shoulders, surely you have some sort of pieces of cloth …'

'I've got pieces of cloth all right, that's no problem,' said Petrovich. 'But I can't sew them on: the thing's completely rotten, put a needle through it and it'll just come apart.'

'Let it come apart and then you can put a patch on straight away.'

'But there's nothing to put the patch onto, nothing to hold it fast, you've worn it terribly thin. You could hardly even call it cloth any more: get it in a strong wind and it'll fall to pieces.'

'But just fix it on somehow. I mean, it can't really !..'

'No,' stated Petrovich decisively, 'there's nothing can be done about it. It's had it. You'd do better, when the cold winter days come, to cut it up into leggings, because socks don't keep your feet warm. They were invented by the Germans, to squeeze more money out of people'- Petrovich never missed a chance of having a dig at the Germans-'and it looks as though you'll to have yourself a new coat made.'

On hearing the word 'new' Akaky Akakievich felt dizzy, and the room swam before his eyes. The only thing he could see at all clearly was the general with paper stuck over his face on the lid of Petrovich's snuff-box. 'How do you mean a new one?' he asked, feeling befuddled, 'I haven't got the money for it.'

'Yes, a new one,' replied Petrovich with sadistic coolness. 'Well, and if I had to have a new one, how much would it sort of, you know …'

You mean, how much would it cost?'

'Yes.'

'Well, a hundred and fifty should about cover it,' said Petrovich a significant pursing of his lips. He was extremely fond of devastating effects, liked to say things which would stun and then slyly watch the expression on the face of his stunned listener caused by these words.

'One hundred and fifty rubles for a coatl' exclaimed poor Akaky Akakievich, raising his voice for perhaps the first time in his whole life, being a person of exceptionally soft-spoken ways.

'Yes sir,' said Petrovich, and you can pay a lot more for a coat. Put a marten collar on it, and a hood with a silk lining and you run into the two hundreds.'

'Please, Petrovich,' said Akaky Akakievich, in an imploring tone, closing his ears to Petrovich's words and all his effects; 'fix it up somehow or other, won't you, so it just lasts a bit longer at least.'

'No; that would mean a waste of work and money,' said Petrovich, and on hearing this final verdict Akaky Akakievich took his leave, a broken man.

After the departure of his customer Petrovich stood motionless for a long time, pursed his lips significantly and did not resume his work, so pleased was he with himself for not letting down either himself, or the tailor's art.

Coming out onto the street Akaky Akakievich felt as though he was dreaming. 'Well, there's a thing,' he said to himself, 'and to think it should turn out this way.' Then, after a short silence he added: 'Well so there it is!' This was followed by another silence, a long one, after which he said: 'Well there! Who would have now … what a … sort of … that is … what a turn of events!' Having said this he did not repair home but set off in quite the opposite direction without himself realising what he was doing. On the way a grimy chimney-sweep bumped into him and completely blackened his shoulder; a whole

hatful of lime was dumped on him from the top storey of a building under construction. He was oblivious to all this, and only when he collided with a policeman, who had put down his halberd in order to shake some snuff out of his tobacco-horn into his rough palm, did he come to his senses a little, and then only because the policeman said to him: 'Where the hell do you think you're going, no room on the pavement or something?' This made him look round and turn back home. Here he started to collect his thoughts and saw his position in its proper light, talking to himself not in his usual jerky way, but coherently and openly, as if with a reasonable friend, with whom one could discuss the most intimate and delicate matter. 'Well no,' said Akaky Akakievich, 'there's no sense in arguing with Petrovich now: he's sort of ... His wife must have sort of thumped him one. I would do better to go to him on Sunday morning: after the Saturday evening before he will be cockeyed and half asleep, and need a drink for his head, but his wife won't give him any money, and there I'll pop him ten kopecks and he'll listen to reason and then the coat will sort of ... ' Following this line of argument Akaky Akakievich cheered himself up and come the following Sunday, waited until he saw Petrovich's wife leave the house on some errand and at once presented himself to Petrovich. As he had thought, Petrovich was certainly groggy, his head drooped and his eyes were thick with sleep, but all the same when the question of the coat was brought up it was as if the devil had got into him. 'No,' he said, 'you'll have to order a new coat.' Whereupon Akaky Akakievich slipped him a tenkopeck piece. 'Thank you, kind sir, I'll fortify myself with a little something and drink your health,' said Petrovich, 'but it's no use asking me to mend your coat: it's no good for anything at all. I'll make you a new coat, a splendid greatcoat, and let's leave it at that.'

Akaky Akakievich attempted to pursue the matter of repairs, but Petrovich would not hear him out and said: 'Yes, I'll make you a new one by all means, you can rely on that, I'll really do my best. We can even follow the latest fashion, and fasten the collar with silver clasps under little flaps.'

At this point Akaky Akakievich saw that there were no two ways about it: he would have to acquire a new coat. He became utterly dejected. How in fact was he going to pay for it-where would he find the money? Of course he could rely partly on the bonus he was due to receive for the holiday, but his money had long ago been accounted for and apportioned for other purposes. He

needed new trousers, and had to pay the shoemaker a long outstanding bill for attaching new uppers to his old boots, he had to order three new shirts from the seamstress and two pairs of those undergarments which it is regarded indecent to mention on the printed page. In other words there would be nothing left of the money, and even if the director in a fit of generosity should give him forty-five or fifty instead of forty rubles he would still only be left with a trifling amount, a mere drop in the ocean of the price of a greatcoat. Although he knew that Petrovich had a habit of naming the most exorbitant prices, sometimes so high that even his wife would be unable to contain herself and exclaim: 'What, are you out of your mind, you half-wit! Another time you'll take work on for nothing, and now you've taken some crazy notion to charge a price which you aren't even worth yourself.' He knew, of course, that Petrovich would undertake to make the coat for eighty rubles, but still where was he going to get eighty rubles? He might have been able to get together half that sum; maybe even a little more, but where would he get the other half ?.. Before going any further we ought to explain that Akaky Akakievich had the habit of saving two kopecks from every ruble he spent, putting it away in a little locked box with a slot in the top for coins. At the end of every six months he would count up the accumulated sum of coppers and replace them with the equivalent in silver. He had maintained this practice for years, and by this time had accumulated a sum in excess of forty rubles. Thus he had half the sum at hand, but where was he to find the other half? Where was he to get another forty rubles? Akaky Akakievich racked his brains and decided that he would have to cut down on his day-to-day expenses, at the very least for one whole year: he would have to forgo his evening cup of tea, light no candles in the evening and if he had any work to do, to go into his landlady's room and do it by the light of her candle; when he walked he would have to tread more gently and carefully along the cobbles and flags, walking almost on tiptoe, so as to spare his shoeleather; he would have to have his laundry done as rarely as possible, and to prevent it getting too dirty would have to undress as soon as he got home and go about in only his cheap cotton dressing-gown, of extreme old age but spared by even the ravages of time. To tell the truth, at first he found it rather hard to accustom himself to such restrictions, but then he grew used to them and took them in his stride; he even became quite used to going entirely without food in the evenings; but then he derived

going entirely without food in the evenings; but then he derived spiritual nourishment, feeding off the dream of his new coat. With this new regime his whole existence seemed to become somehow more fulfilled, as, if he had got married, as if there were some other person with him, as if he were not alone but some amiable companion had agreed to step down the rest of life's path with him-and this companion was none other that his heavy padded greatcoat, with its long-lasting and robust lining. He became somehow more alive, and stronger in character, like a man who has determined his goal in life. His face and behaviour lost their unsureness and indecision, that is, all their vacillating and vague features. At times his eyes would light up and the boldest and most daring thoughts would flit through his head: perhaps he would have that marten collar after all. His deliberations about this made him quite absent-minded, and one day during his copying he so nearly made a mistake that he exclaimed 'Lord!' almost out loud and crossed himself. At least once every month he would call in at Petrovich's shop to talk about the coat, asking what the best place was to buy cloth, which colour he should get, how much he should pay and would come home happy, if a little troubled, but content with the thought that soon the time would come when he could actually make the purchase and the coat would be ready. This moment arrived even sooner than he had expected. Contrary to all his expectations, the director awarded Akaky Akakievich a bonus of not forty, nor forty five, but all of sixty rubles: perhaps he had a premonition that Akaky Akakievich needed the coat very badly, or perhaps it just happened this way, but the upshot was that Akaky Akakievich was twenty rubles to the clear. This turn of events accelerated proceedings. After another two or three months of privation, Akaky Akakievich had the sum ready. His heart, normally so calm, started to pound. The very next day he set off with Petrovich to the shops. They bought a length of very fine cloth-and no wonder, for they had been thinking about this purchase for the last six months and nary a month had passed without them going round the shops to compare prices. Even Petrovich himself said that they would not find better cloth anywhere. They choose calico for the lining, but of such good quality and so firm that, in Petrovich's words, it was better than silk and even glossier and more impressive to look at. They decided against the marten because it was too dear, but instead chose the best cat skins they could find in the shops, cat skins that from afar would easily pass for

marten. Petrovich worked at the coat for a full two weeks because there was a lot of quilting work to be done; otherwise it would have been finished sooner. Petrovich took twelve rubles for the work-it could not have been done for a kopeck less: everything was sewn with silk thread, with small-stitched double seams, and afterwards Petrovich worked over every seam with his very own teeth, pressing out various decorative shapes. The day when Petrovich finally brought the greatcoat ... it's hard to say with any exactitude what day it was, but it was probably the most memorable day in Akaky Akakievich's life. He brought it in the morning, early enough for Akaky Akakievich to wear it to work. The coat could not have been finished at a more opportune moment, for the hard frosts had just set in and the weather was threatening to get colder still. Petrovich brought the coat himself, as befits a good tailor. The expression of solemnity on his face was such as Akaky Akakievich had never before seen. Seemingly, in his awareness of the greatness of his undertaking he had suddenly become conscious of the great chasm that divides tailors who merely sew in linings and do repairs from those who create new garments. He took the coat out of the handkerchief in which he had carried it; even the handkerchief was freshly laundered-he then folded it up and put it in his pocket for future use. Holding up the coat he regarded it with great pride and with a deft sweep of his hands threw it over Akaky Akakievich's shoulders, straightened it out, pulled it down at the back and finally draped it round Akaky Akakievich with its buttons undone. Akaky Akakievich, with the fussiness of middle age, was anxious to put it on properly and Petrovich helped him put his arms in the sleeves-and it sat well like that too. In other words, the coat proved to be a perfect fit. Petrovich did not miss the opportunity of saying that it was only because he lived on a small street and had no sign, and furthermore had known Akaky Akakievich for so long, that he had charged him so little; while on Nevsky Prospekt for the work alone he would have had to pay seventy-five rubles. Akaky Akakievich did not wish to discuss this point with Petrovich as he was afraid of the sound of large sums which Petrovich mentioned to stun his clients. He settled up with him, expressed his thanks and at once repaired to the department in his new greatcoat. Petrovich left with him and stood on the street for a long time watching the retreating coat, and then intentionally made a detour down a

crooked sidestreet which brought him out further down the same street again where he had another look at his coat, but this time from a different aspect, that is, en face. Meanwhile Akaky Akakievich stepped along in as festive a mood as could be. Every minute and every second he was aware that he had on his shoulders his new greatcoat, and a couple of times he even chuckled for sheer pleasure. In actual fact the coat offered two advantages: one that it was warm, and the other that it looked well. He did not notice the road at all and suddenly found himself in the department; in the lobby he cast off the coat, examined it from all sides, and submitted it to the special surveillance of the porter. We do not know exactly how everyone in the department learnt that Akaky Akakievich had a new coat and that the old smock was no more. They all dashed out into the lobby to look at their colleague's latest acquisition, and started congratulating him and wishing him well, so that at first Akaky Akakievich only smiled, and then started to feel a little embarrassed. When they all set upon him demanding that the happy event should be celebrated and that the least he could do was to give a party for them, Akaky Akakievich became thoroughly confused and did not know how on earth he was to get out of it. After several minutes of this he started naively assuring them, flushing deeply, that it was not a new coat at all, but in fact his old one. Finally one of the officials, with the high rank of assistant to a headclerk, announced, in order, probably, to show that he was not at all stuffy and prepared to associate even with his inferiors: 'Be that as it may; I shall give the party instead of Akaky Akakievich and invite you all round to my place today for tea: by a lucky coincidence it is my birthday today.' The officials at once congratulated the assistant headclerk and enthusiastically welcomed the invitation. Akaky Akakievich attempted to make his excuse, but they all said that this was bad manners, that he should be ashamed of himself, and there was nothing for it but to accept. Moreover he himself started to look forward to the party when he realized that it would give him an extra chance to show off his greatcoat, this time in the evening. The whole of this day was for Akaky Akakievich the most exciting holiday imaginable. He returned home in the best possible frame of mind, threw off his coat and hung it carefully on a hook, looked lovingly once again at the cloth and lining, and then got out his old smock, by now completely ragged, to compare them. As he looked at it he even laughed out loud: what an enormous difference! And for a long time after this, as he sat at

his dinner, he chuckled whenever he thought of the appalling state of his old smock. He thoroughly enjoyed his dinner and afterwards did not do any copying, none at all, preferring instead in sybaritic fashion to lounge on his bed until it grew dark. Then, without further ado, he got dressed, donned his new coat and set out into the street. Where exactly the official lived who was giving the party I cannot unfortunately say: my memory is starting to let us down badly and everything in St. Petersburg, all its streets and buildings have all become so jumbled around in my head that it is very hard to extract anything from it in proper shape. All that I do know for certain is that this official lived in the better part of town, that is, nowhere near Akaky Akakievich. At first Akaky Akakievich had to go down some deserted and dimly-lit streets but as he got nearer the official's flat the streets became more alive, more populated and better lit. There were more and more pedestrians, including ladies in elegant costume, men with beaver collars, and less and less cheap cabbies with their wooden-slatted sleighs, decked out with brass nails-their place was taken by smart cabbies in crimson velvet caps, careering down the street in gleaming varnished sleights draped in bearskins, and carriages with brightly decorated boxes, their wheels creaking over the snow. Akaky Akakievich regarded all this with wonderment. It was several years since he had stepped out onto the street in the evening. He paused to examine with interest a picture in the brightly-lit window of a shop, which depicted a beautiful woman removing a shoe, and in the process exposing the whole length of her most shapely leg: whilst behind her a man with whiskers and a dapper imperial could be seen peeping through the doorway from another room. Akaky Akakievich shook his head and chuckled, then continued on his way. Perhaps he chuckled because he had beheld something quite unfamiliar, but of the sort which everyone nevertheless senses intuitively, or perhaps he was thinking, like many another official would in his place: These Frenchmen !.. You have to hand it to them, once they sort of get their mind on a thing they really sort of ... ' But on the other hand, maybe he was not thinking this at all-after all, you cannot see into the mind of another person and discover what the what he is thinking. He finally reached the house in which the assistant headclerk rented an apartment. The assistant headclerk lived in style: a lamp burned on the staircase, leading to the second-floor apartment. Entering the hall Akaky Akakievich saw rows of galoshes on the floor. In their midst, in the middle of the hall stood a samovar, which hissed and emitted puffs of steam. Hanging on

a samovar, which hissed and emitted puffs of steam. Hanging on the walls were masses of greatcoats and cloaks, some of which were even fitted out with beaver collars or velvet lapels. Through the wall he could hear a din of voices, which suddenly became clear and ringing when the door was opened and out walked a footman bearing a tray set with emptied cup, a cream-jug and basket of biscuits. It was apparent that the officials had been gathered for some time, and had already drunk their first cup of tea. Akaky Akakievich, having hung up his coat himself, entered the room and was dazzled by the array of candles, officials, pipes and card-tables, and his ears rang with the confused clamour of voices conversing on all sides and the noise of chairs being shifted. He stood in the centre of the room feeling quite at a loss, looking around and trying to work out what he should do. But he had already been noticed, and was received with shouts of welcome, which were followed by a general stampede into the hall for another look at his new coat. Akaky Akakievich was perhaps a little abashed, but simple soul that he was, could not help delighting at the lavish praises bestowed on his greatcoat. Then, of course, everyone abandoned both him and his coat and repaired, as was to be expected, to their tables, set out for whist. All this: the noise, chatter and numbers of people, was all quite novel to Akaky Akakievich. He simply did not know what to do with himself, where to put his hands, feet and all his person; finally he joined one of the tables, looked at the cards, stared at the faces of various of the players and after a little while started to yawn, feeling that all this was rather boring, and moreover that it was long past his bedtime. He tried to take his leave of his host, but the others would not let him, protesting that they simply had to drink a glass of champagne to celebrate the new purchase. An hour later dinner was served, consisting of mixed salad, cold veal, pâté, pastries and champagne. Akaky Akakievich was made to drink two glasses, after which he felt that it was altogether much jollier in the room, while he still could not forget that it was past twelve and long since time for him to be going home. Lest his host attempt somehow to detain him still further he slipped out of the room surreptitiously, hunted for his coat, which he observed with some distress lying on the floor, shook it out, picked all the fluff off it, threw it across his shoulders and descended the stairs into the street. It was still light outside. A few small shops of the sort that are always used as clubs by the servant classes and their ilk, were still open, while others, which had by then closed, cast

long slivers of light through the chinks in their doors, which meant that they were not yet deserted, probably harbouring parlour maids or menservants, who would be finishing off their evening's gossip, while their masters and mistresses remained totally mystified as to their whereabouts. Akaky Akakievich walked along feeling on top of the world, at one point almost breaking into a run, for no apparent reason, in pursuit of some lady who flitted past him like a flash of lightning, showing extraordinary mobility in every part of her body. However, he at once stopped and walked on at his previous gentle pace, himself amazed at this quite inexplicable burst of speed. Soon he entered those deserted streets, which by day are bleak enough places to walk, to say nothing of night time. At this hour they were even more dismal and deserted: the streetlamps became fewer and further between-oil was clearly in scarcer supply here; wooden houses and fences superseded brick and iron; not a soul was in sight; all the light came from the snow glinting on the street while the low huts slept glumly behind their dark shutters. By now he was near the point where the street entered an enormous square, a terrible empty wilderness, on the far side of which the buildings were barely visible.

In the far distance he could see shining the lamp of a sentry-booth, which appeared to stand on the very edge of the world. At this point Akaky Akakievich's good cheer noticeably deteriorated. He set forth across the square with unaccountable fear, as if with inner premonitions of something evil. He looked behind and about him: it was as though he were on the high seas. 'No, better not to look,' he thought and walked on with his eyes shut, and when he next opened them in order to see how far he was from the edge of the square he suddenly saw, standing right before his nose, some people with moustaches, although he was quite unable to make them out. His eyes clouded over and his heart began to pound. 'Oi-that's my coat you're wearing!' exclaimed one of them in a threatening voice, seizing him by the collar. Akaky Akakievich was on the point of calling out for help when the other put his fist-the size of a civil servant's head-against his mouth and growled: 'Just you try and shout!' After this Akaky Akakievich could only recall that they removed his coat, then one of them kneed him and he fell on his back in the snow and felt nothing more. A few minutes later he came round and rose to his feet, but by this time there was no one to be seen. He felt cold out in the open, and realising that his coat was gone started to call out, but his voice was too feeble to carry across the square. In total despair, and shouting frantically, he set off at a run across the

total despair, and shouting frantically, he set off at a run across the square heading directly for the booth. Next to this stood the duty constable, leaning on his halberd, and regarding Akaky Akakievich with curiosity, clearly wondering who the devil this was, running and shouting to him from afar. As he came up to him Akaky Akakievich, gasping for breath, started to rail at him for sleeping at his post and letting people be robbed under his very nose. The constable replied that he had not seen anything, that he had seen him being stopped by two people in the square and had assumed they were his friends; and that, instead of wasting his time shouting, he should go and see the sergeant the next day and the sergeant would find out who robbed him. Akaky Akakievich ran home in a terrible state; his hair, of which small tufts still remained on his temples and the back of his head, was completely dishevelled, his side and chest and his trousers were covered in snow. The old woman, his landlady, on hearing a fearful banging on the door, hastily sprang from her bed and wearing only one slipper ran to open the door, modestly holdin-glong slivers of light through the chinks in their doors, which meant her nightshirt across her bosom. On opening the door she stepped backwards in shock, seeing Akaky Akakievich in such a state. However, when she heard his story she clapped her hands and declared that he should go straight to the inspector, that the sergeant would tell all sorts of lies, make promises and do nothing about it; and that he would do best to go straight to the inspector, that he was even an acquaintance of hers, because Anna, the Finnish girl who used to work for her as a cook, was now in the inspector's employ as a nanny, that she often saw him passing their house, and also that he went to church every Sunday, cast cheerful looks about him while praying and consequently must be a kind man. On hearing this advice Akaky Akakievich went forlornly to his room, and as for the way he spent the night there, we shall leave that up to the imagination of the reader who can put himself in someone else's shoes. Early the following morning he set off to see the inspector; but there he was informed that the inspector was asleep; he came back at ten and once again was told that he was asleep; he came at eleven and was told that the inspector was not at home; he came at lunchtime but the clerks in the front room would not admit him until they had heard what his business was, what need he had on the inspector and what had happened. For once in his life Akaky Akakievich showed a bit of character and said straight out that he had to see the inspector

in person, that they had no right to refuse him admission, that he had come from the department on official business, and that if they were not careful he would file a complaint against them. This the clerks did not dare counter, and one of them went to call the inspector. But the inspector's reaction to the story about the robbery was really most extraordinary. Instead of turning his attention to the main point at issue he started asking Akaky Akakievich why he had been coming home so late, had he perhaps been visiting some house of ill repute, with the result that Akaky Akakievich quite lost his composure and took his leave without even knowing whether the matter of the greatcoat would be looked into or not. The whole of this day he was absent from the office-the first such occasion in his life. The following day he turned up at work as pale as a ghost wearing his old smock, which had acquired an even more pathetic aspect. The tale of the robbery, although some officials had no compunction about laughing at Akaky Akakievich even at this sad juncture, touched many of them to the quick. They resolved at once to pass the hat around for him, but a completely trifling sum was collected because the department staff had already had to pay out a lot of money in contributions, first towards a portrait of the director, and then towards some new book, which their section head had recommended, being a friend of the author's. As a result they could only muster a paltry sum. One of their number, particularly moved with compassion, decided at least to help Akaky Akakievich with a piece of useful advice, and told him to go not to the police sergeant, because even though the sergeant, anxious to win the approval of his superiors, might just recover the coat somehow or other, the coat would still remain in the police station unless he could provide legal evidence of his ownership. Instead he should go and see a certain *important personage*, and that this *important personage* by sending notes and memorandums to the right people, would put things on the right track. Akaky Akakievich had no option but to go and see the *important personage*. Exactly what office was held by the *important personage* and what this entailed remains a mystery to this day. All that we can say is that the *important personage* had only recently been made an important personage, and prior to that had been an unimportant personage. Furthermore his new office was not regarded as particularly important by comparison with those of certain other even more important personages. But then you will always find people who regard as important what is regarded as

augment his importance in all sorts of ways: namely, by directing that junior officials meet him on the staircase when he came to work; that no one dare come straight to see him, but that the following strict order be observed: the collegiate registrar make a report to the guberni? secretary, the gubernia secretary to the titular councillor, or whoever came next in seniority, and thus the matter would eventually reach him. For such is the pass to which holy Russia has come: imitation is the order of the day and everyone is busy aping their superiors. The story is even told of some titular councillor who, on being put in charge of some minor department, at once partitioned off a room of his own, calling it 'head office' and posted beadles at the door in red collars and gold braid, who would step forward to open the door for any visitor, although the 'head office' was barely big enough to accommodate an ordinary desk. The habits and methods of the important personage were appropriately grand and imposing, but in no way complicated. The cornerstone of his system was strictness. 'Strictness, strictness and strictness,' he was wont to say, and on pronouncing the last word would look most significantly into the face of his listener. Although in fact there was no reason for this because the dozen officials who made up the entire administrative mechanism of the office abided in a state of permanent fear anyway: on seeing their principal approaching from afar they would abandon what they were doing and stand at attention until he had passed through the room. His conversation with subordinates was marked by its strictness and consisted almost exclusively of three phrases: 'how do you dare ..? are you aware who you're talking to? do you realise who's standing before you?' For all that, he was a kind man at heart, companionable and obliging; but his head had been completely turned by his promotion. On receiving the rank of general he became quite confused and no longer knew how to conduct himself. When in the company of his equals he could be quite a decent chap and in many respects even rather astute; but the moment he found himself in company with people even one rank below him he would be quite unable to cope: he would maintain a stony silence, and his position was all the more pitiable because he himself evidently felt that he could be spending the time in a much more enjoyable fashion. Sometimes his eyes expressed a strong desire to join in some interesting conversation or group, but he would be stayed by the thought: would this not be rather beneath his dignity, would it not be overfamiliar and detract from his importance? After such considerations he always

preserved his stony silence, only pronouncing the occasional monosyllable, and in this way acquired a reputation of a most tedious man. It was to this important personage that our Akaky Akakievich repaired, choosing a most unfavourable time, most unfortunate for Akaky Akakievich but fortunate for the important personage. The important personage was sitting in his office and conversing in the most cheerful fashion with an old acquaintance and childhood friend who had recently arrived in the capital, whom he had not seen for several years. Whilst thus engaged he was informed that one Bashmachkin had come to see him. He snapped: 'Who is he?' and received the reply: 'Some official.' 'In that case let him wait, I've no time now,' he said, at which point we should note that the important personage was telling a blatant lie: he had plenty of time, he and his friend had long ago covered all topics of interest and their conversation had degenerated into long silences punctuated by the occasional slap on one another's thigh and exclamation: 'Well now, Ivan Abramovich! 'So fancy that, Stepan Varlamovich!' Nevertheless he ordered the official to wait, in order to show his friend, a man who had long ago retired from service to his country home, how long officials were required to wait in his antechamber. Finally, when they had had their fill of talking, and still more of long silences, and had finished smoking their cigars in their extremely comfortable chairs with reclining backs, he suddenly pretended to remember something and said to his secretary who had stopped inside the door to take a report: 'Um, there's some official out there, is there not? Tell him to come in.' Observing Akaky Akakievich's downcast look and shabby old uniform he briskly swung round to face him and enquired: 'What is it?' in a snappy hard voice, which he had carefully cultivated behind locked doors, training in solitude in front of a mirror a week before receiving his promotion and his present position. Akaky Akakievich who had already been feeling appropriately awe-struck, somewhat lost his composure, and, in so far as his tongue-tied state would allow, explained with even more than his usual admixture of 'sort-of's', that he had this brand new greatcoat, and he had been robbed in the most barbaric fashion, and that he was now turning to His Excellency, in order that through his intercession he might sort of get in touch with his honour the chief inspector of police, or someone else, and retrieve his coat. The general, for some obscure reason, regarded Akaky Akakievich's conduct as familiar. 'Do you mean, my good man,' he continued in the same sharp voice, 'that you don't

know the form? Do you know where you are? or how to conduct these matters properly? You should first have submitted a request about this to the office, it would have been passed to the headclerk, then to the department head, and then handed to the secretary and the secretary would have passed it on to myself … ‘

‘But, Your Excellency,’ said Akaky Akakievich, striving to gather together all his meagre resources of courage, and at the same time breaking into a fearful sweat: ‘I have made so bold as to trouble Your Excellency because you see your secretaries … are … er … an unreliable lot … ‘

‘I beg your pardon?’ said the important personage. ‘How dare you be so impudent? where on earth do you get such ideas from? what have the younger generation come to, treating their superiors with such mutinous impudence ?! ‘

The important personage had apparently not noticed that Akaky Akakievich was already on the wrong side of fifty. Or perhaps he was assigning him to the younger generation in a relative sense, that is with relation to someone who was already the wrong side of seventy. ‘Are you aware who you’re talking to? Do you realise who is standing before you? I’m asking you a question: do you hear me?’ At this point he stamped his foot, and raised his voice to such a pitch that anyone, not only Akaky Akakievich, would have been quite terrified. Akaky Akakievich was paralyzed with terror, and lurched backwards, shaking from head to toe, quite unable to remain on his feet: if two attendants had not run up at that point and supported him he would have fallen flat on his face. He was carried out almost unconscious. The important personage, delighted with the effect of his words, which had surpassed even his expectations, and quite intoxicated with the thought that his word alone could brighten a person out of his senses, gave his friend a sideways look to see how this was being received and noted not without gratification that his friend was in a most precarious state and was even beginning himself to show signs of fear.

How he got down the stairs and out into the street Akaky Akakievich was unable to recall. He could feel neither his legs nor his arms. In all his life he had never been given such a wigging by a general, let alone one from another department. Open-mouthed and constantly stumbling off the pavement he made his way through the snowstorm which was whistling down the street. The wind, as is

customary in St. Petersburg, blew at him simultaneously from all sides, down all the streets and lanes. In no time he felt his chest tighten and when he dragged himself home he had completely lost his voice, and took to his bed with a swollen throat. Such is the effect a good dressing-down can have! The next day he was found to have a high fever. Thanks to the magnanimous assistance of the Petersburg climate the sickness took its course faster than was expected, and when eventually the doctor arrived and took his pulse he could only prescribe him a poultice, solely in order to ensure that the patient was not entirely deprived of the benefit of medicine, and thereupon declared that in a day and a half he would be a goner. After which he turned to the landlady and said: I'd advise you, my good woman, not to waste any time, and order him a pinewood coffin right away, because he won't be able to afford an oak one.' We do not know whether Akaky Akakievich heard these fatal words, or, if he did, whether they made any impression on him, whether he was sorry to depart this wretched life, because all this time he remained in a high fever and state of delirium. He had hallucinations, each one stranger than the last: he would see Petrovich and order a new coat from him fitted with special traps for thieves, whom he was forever seeing under the bed, he kept calling for the landlady to remove a thief who had even got under the bedclothes; or he would ask why his old smock was hanging in front of him, that he had a new greatcoat; or he would fancy he was standing in front of the general, receiving a thorough dressing-down and muttering: 'Very sorry, Your Excellency', and finally he let forth such a torrent of foul and blasphemous curses that his good landlady even crossed herself, never before in her life having heard him pronounce anything like it, and all the more appalled because these words were preceded by an introductory: 'Your Excellency'. Later on he started to rant; it was only apparent that his jumbled speech and thoughts were all centred on the ill-fated greatcoat. Finally poor Akaky Akakievich breathed his last. They did not bother to seal up either his room or his possessions, firstly because there were no heirs, and secondly be-causeknow the form? Do you know where you are? or how to conduct he left very little behind him, namely: a bunch of goosequills, a quire of white office paper, three pairs of socks, two or three buttons which had come off his trousers, and the old smock already familiar to the reader. Who got it all God only knows: and I must confess that the present narrator of this story has made no attempt to find

out. His corpse was carried out and laid in its grave, and St. Petersburg continued its life without Akaky Akakievich just as if he had never existed. No trace remained of this creature protected by no one, dear to no one, of interest to no one, not even attracting the attention of the naturalist who will eagerly seize the opportunity of putting a common housefly on a pin and studying it through a microscope; a creature who had endured with humility the jeers of his fellow-clerks and had gone to his grave without any great achievement to his name, but whose wretched life had nevertheless been brightened for one brief moment so shortly before its end by a radiant visitation in the form of a new greatcoat, but who had then been destroyed by an intolerable blow of misfortune, as crushing as those suffered by the lords and sovereigns of this world … A few days after his death the watchman from his department was sent to his flat with instructions that he should come to work forthwith: such was the director's command; but the watchman was forced to return without him, reporting that he would not come to work any more, and when asked 'Why not?' replying: 'Well he's dead, see, and they buried him three days ago.' Thus did they find out about Akaky Akakievich's death in the department and the very next day his place was occupied by another clerk, much taller than his late predecessor, and copying his letters in a hand quite unlike Akaky Akakievich's upright ciphers, sloping heavily to one side.

But you will be most surprised to learn that this is not the end of Akaky Akakievich's story, that he was fated to live on after his death for a few spectacular days, as if by way of compensation for his insipid life. It so happened that our bleak story had an unexpected and fantastic ending. Rumours suddenly started to circulate round. St. Petersburg that by Kalinkin Bridge and far beyond it a ghost had been seen at night. This ghost had the guise of an official searching for some stolen greatcoat and went about rending from the shoulders of all and sundry, regardless of rank and title, their coats to replace his own: coats with catfur and beaver linings, quilted coats, racoon, fox and bearskin coats, in other words coats of every manner of fur and skin ever employed by people to cover their own skin. One of the department officials saw the ghost himself and at once recognized Akaky Akakievich, but this struck such fear into his heart that he turned tail and fled and thus failed to get a good look at him, and only saw him wag a threatening finger at him from afar.

Complaints came pouring in that the backs and shoulders of citizens-not only titular councillors but even privy councillors-had been subjected to the rigours of the nocturnal frost as a result of losing their coats to this ghostly marauder. The police put out an order to detain the ghost, at whatever cost, alive or dead, and to punish him, as an example for others, in the severest fashion, and they were very nearly successful in carrying out this directive. A police constable on the beat in Kiryushkin Street actually caught the dead culprit by the scruff of his neck at the very scene of his crime, as he attempted to wrest a worsted overcoat from the back of some retired musician who in his time had played the flute. Seizing him by the collar he shouted for two colleagues, whom he instructed to hold the ghost while he swiftly reached into his boot for his snuff-box intending to reanimate his chronically frozen nose, however the snuff was evidently so potent that even a dead man could not take it. No sooner had the constable closed his right nostril with a finger and sniffed a liberal pinch up the other than the dead man emitted such a sneeze that all three of them were temporarily blinded by the spray. In the space of time it took them to raise their hands to wipe their eyes there was no trace of the dead man, and they could not even say with certainty whether they ever had him in their hands at all. After that the constables became so fearful of dead men that they were even wary of laying hands on the living, and would shout from a distance: 'Hey you, move along now!' The dead official even started to appear beyond Kalinkin Bridge, striking fear into the hearts of all timid people. But we have quite forgotten about the *important personage*, who in a sense was the real cause of this fantastic twist to our, incidentally, entirely authentic story. Our devotion to the truth requires us to say that this *important personage*, shortly after the departure of poor, thoroughly dressed-down Akaky Akakievich, felt something in the nature of regret. Compassion was not an entirely alien emotion to him; his heart was affected by many kind stirrings, for all that his rank usually prevented him from revealing them. As soon as his visiting friend had taken his leave his thoughts returned to poor Akaky Akakievich. And after that almost every day he would see in his mind's eye the pale countenance of Akaky Akakievich, crumbling under his thorough dressing-down. He became so disturbed by these visions that a week later he even decided to send an official to Akaky Akakievich to find out what the trouble was, and whether it would not after all be possible to help him. When they reported

back that Akaky Akakievich had suddenly been carried off by a fever he was quite shocked, hearing the reproaches of his conscience, and remained out of sorts for the whole of that day. Wishing to distract himself somehow or other and put this unpleasant news out of his mind he set off to spend the evening with a friend, in whose house he would be sure to find decent company, and best of all, where almost everyone held the same rank, so that he did not feel trammelled in any way. This had a remarkable effect on his state of mind. He became quite relaxed, conversed in the most agreeable manner, was amiable to all and, in a word, thoroughly enjoyed the evening, He drank a couple of glasses of champagne at dinner, a well-known means of restoring good humour. The champagne put him in a pranksome mood and he decided not to go home yet but to visit a lady of his acquaintance called Karolina Ivanovna, of supposedly German origins, towards whom he entertained the friendliest relations. We should point out here that the important personage was no longer a young man, a good husband to his wife and father to his children. His two sons, one of whom was already in the civil service and his attractive sixteen-year-old daughter with her slightly snubbed but pretty nose would come to him every day to kiss his hand, saying: '*Bonjour, papa*.' His spouse, a lady of presentable mien, and even not at all unattractive, would first give him her hand to kiss and then turn it over and kiss his hand. But the important personage, while thoroughly content with these domestic family endearments thought it not unethical to cultivate a friendly relationship with a lady in another part of town. This lady acquaintance was no prettier or younger than his wife; but such puzzling things occur in this world and it is not our job to pass judgement on them. Thus, the important personage descended the stairs, seated himself in his sleigh and bade the coachman: 'To Karolina Ivanovna's', while he himself wrapped himself luxuriously in his warm greatcoat, and remained in that state so cherished by the average Russian, when he himself does not have to think for the thoughts come into his head of their own will, each one more pleasing than the last, and requiring no exhausting pursuit. Replete with contentment, he cast his mind back over all the amusing moments of the dinner party, all the witticisms which had aroused laughter in his small circle; many of these he even repeated to himself sotto voce and discovered that they were quite as funny as before and thus we shall not be surprised to learn that he

himself laughed out loud. However, his pleasure was occasionally marred by a gust of wind, which would spring up God knows from where or for which reason, and whipped his face, lashing it with pellets of snow, flapping the collar of his coat like a canvas sail, or suddenly blowing the shoulder-flap with a quite unnatural force over his head and causing him no end of bother to extricate himself. Suddenly the important personage felt himself being seized firmly by the collar. Turning round he perceived a small man in an old, worn-out uniform, and was not a little horrified to recognize Akaky Akakievich. The old official's face was as white as snow, and he looked exactly like a corpse. But the horror of the important personage passed all bounds when he saw the dead man's mouth contort, and, exhaling a terrible smell of the grave, utter the following words: 'Aha! so there you are! at last I've got you by the scruff of the neck! it's your greatcoat I'm after! you didn't want to help me and even gave me a dressing-down so now you can hand over your coat!' The wretched important personage almost died. For all his great strength of character in the office and in general with those of inferior rank, and for all his manly figure and appearance, on beholding which people would exclaim: 'Goodness, what character!' at the present moment he, like a lot of people endowed with heroic appearances, felt such terror that he even feared he might suffer a morbific seizure. He threw off his coat as quickly as he could and called to the driver in an unnatural voice: Turn home, and make it fast!' The driver, hearing that tone of voice that is usually employed in decisive moments and is usually accompanied by something far more emphatic, took the precaution of hunching his shoulders, cracked his whip and they shot forward like an arrow from a bow. In about six minutes the important personage was already at the entrance to his house. Pale, in a state of shock and coatless, he had driven home, abandoning his plan of going to Karolina Ivanovna's. Somehow or other he staggered to his room and spent the night in a state of such great agitation, that the following morning his daughter told him flatly: 'Papa, today you are quite pale.' But papa held his tongue and said not a word to anyone about what had happened, where he had been and where he was planning to go. This adventure had the most pronounced effect on him. He even stopped saying so often to his inferiors: 'How dare you-do you realise who you're speaking to?' and if he did say it, it was not without first listening to

what the other had to say. But the most remarkable fact of all was the total disappearance of the official's ghost after this date: it was clear that the general's greatcoat was just what he wanted: at any rate no more stories were told of people having their coats torn from their backs. However, many busy-bodies were unable to calm down and claimed that the official was still appearing in outlying areas of the city. And it is quite true that a constable in the Kolomna district with his own eyes saw a ghost appear from behind a building; but the constable was by nature such a feeble man that he was once knocked off his feet by an ordinary young pig which came hurtling out of some private house, to the great hilarity of the cabbies standing nearby, for which insolence he fined them a kopeck each, using the money to buy snuff. This same weakling of a constable did not have the courage to stop him and instead followed him in the darkness until the ghost suddenly stopped, swung round and asked: 'What do you want?' exhibiting such a fist as you would see on no living man. The constable replied 'Nothing', and beat a smart retreat. However, this ghost was much taller, with the most enormous moustaches, and heading off in the direction of the Obukhov Bridge, was soon lost in the darkness.

*Translated* from Russian by Christopher English

## Questions for Discussion

1. **Describe the last day of Akaky's miserable life. Do you agree with the view that his punishment is not death but the misery he had to live through?**

2. **What 'unexpected and fantastic ending' does the narrator give 'The Greatcoat'?**

3. **Describe how the important personage met the 'ghost' of Akaky Akakievich.**

4. **How does the narrator of 'The Greatcoat' endeavour to make the unremarkable life of Akaky Akakievich remarkable?**

5. **Is 'The Greatcoat' a critique of bureaucracy? What dehumanizing aspects of clerical life does the narrator highlight in the story?**

# Part One

# Section C: Essay

# UNIT TEN

# From A Glossary of Literary Terms: Modernism and Postmodernism, Feminist Criticism

## M.H. Abrams

**About the author** Meyer Howard Abrams (b. 1912), American teacher, scholar, and editor, is the author of two path-breaking studies of English Romanticism: The Mirror and the Lamp (1951) and Natural Supernaturalism (1971). A larger world of students and teachers knows him as the author of the widely used Glossary of Literary Terms, reprinted and revised many times, since its first appearance in 1957.

**About the essay** The entries on 'Modernism and Postmodermism' and 'Feminist Criticism' in Abrams give you a bird's eye view of two very large and complex scenes of writing. Since these and related ideas emerged at a time when literature crossed a threshold from the texts themselves to their scenes of writing, Abrams cannot easily gloss them as simple ideas, schools, or movements, and give us representative figures and texts by which we shall know them. It is important to remember, therefore, that Abrams is covering large and complicated subjects in a few pages by offering highly selective, it arbitrary, examples, views, and stances. Even longer and more extensive studies deal with only select issues and themes within these theoretically complex phenomena.

It is suggested, therefore, that you test Abrams against your own experience of reading the texts and authors mentioned in Abrams' entries.

Modernism and Postmodernism. The term modernism is widely used to identify new and distinctive features in the subjects, forms, concepts, and styles of literature and the other arts in the early decades of the present century, but especially after World War I (1914-1918). The specific features signified by 'modernism' vary with the user, but many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but of Western culture in general. Important intellectual precursors of modernism, in this sense, are thinkers who had questioned the certainties that had supported traditional modes of social organization, religion, and morality, and also traditional ways of conceiving the human self-thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and James G. Frazer, whose The Golden Bough (1890-1915) stressed the correspondence between central Christian tenets and pagan, often barbaric myths and rituals.

Some literary historians locate the beginning of the modernist revolt as far back as the 1890s, but most agree that 'high modernism,' marked by an unexampled range and rapidity of change, came after the first World War. The year 1922 alone was signalized by the simultaneous appearance of such monuments of modernist innovation as James Joyce's Ulysses, T. S. Eliot's The Waste Land, and Virginia Woolf's Jacob's Room, as well as many other experimental works of literature. The catastrophe of the war had shaken faith in the continuity of Western civilization and raised doubts about the adequacy of traditional literary modes to represent the harsh and dissonant realities of the postwar world. T. S. Eliot wrote in a review of Joyce's Ulysses in 1923 that the inherited mode of ordering a literary work, which assumed a relatively coherent and stable social order, could not accord with 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history.' Like Joyce and Ezra Pound in his Cantos, Eliot experimented with new forms and a new style that would render contemporary disorder, often contrasting it to a lost order and integration that had been based on the religion and myths of the cultural past. In The Waste Land (1922), for example, Eliot replaced the standard flow of poetic language by fragmented utterances, and substituted for the traditional coherence of poetic structure a deliberate dislocation of parts, in which very diverse components are related by connections that are left to the reader to discover, or invent. Major

works of modernist fiction, following Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and his even more radical *Finnegans Wake* (1939), subvert the basic conventions of earlier prose fiction by breaking up the narrative continuity, departing from the standard ways of representing characters, and violating the traditional syntax and coherence of narrative language by the use of stream of consciousness and other innovative modes of narration. Gertrude Stein-often linked with Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and Woolf as a trail-blazing modernist-experimented with writing that achieved its effects by violating the norms of standard English syntax and sentence structure. These new forms of construction in verse, prose, and narrative were emulated and carried further by many poets and novelists; they have obvious parallels in the violation of representational conventions in expressionism and surrealism, in the modernist paintings and sculpture of Cubism, Futurism, and Abstract Expressionism, and in the violations of standard conventions of melody, harmony, and rhythm by the modernist musical composers Stravinsky and Schoenberg, and their radical followers.

A prominent feature of modernism is the phenomenon called the avant-garde (a military metaphor: 'advance-guard'); that is, a small, self-conscious group of artists and authors who deliberately undertake, in Ezra Pound's phrase, to 'make it new.' By violating the accepted conventions and proprieties, not only of art but of social discourse, they set out to create ever-new artistic forms and styles and to introduce hitherto neglected, and sometimes forbidden, subject matters. Frequently avant-garde artists represent themselves as'alienated' from the established order, against which they assert their own autonomy; a prominent aim is to shock the sensibilities of the conventional reader and to challenge the norms and pieties of the dominant bourgeois culture. See Renato Poggioli, T*he Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1968). Peter Burger's Theory of the Avant-Garde (1984) is a neo-Marxist analysis of modernism and of its distinctive cultural formation, the avant-garde.

The term postmodernism is sometimes applied to the literature and art after World War II (1939-45), when the effects on Western morale of the first war were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation.

Postmodernism involves not only a continuation; sometimes carried to an extreme, of the countertraditional experiments of modernism, but also diverse attempts to break away from modernist forms which had, inevitably, become in their turn conventional, as well as to overthrow the elitism of modernist 'high art' by recourse to the models of 'mass culture' in film, television, newspaper cartoons, and popular music. Many of the works of postmodern literature-by Jorge Luis Borges, Thomas Pynchon; Roland Barthes, and many others-so blend literary genres, cultural and stylistic levels, the serious and the playful, that they resist classification according to traditional literary rubrics. And these literary anomalies are paralleled in other arts by phenomena like pop art, op art, the musical compositions of John Cage, and the films of Jean-Luc Godard and other directors.

An undertaking in some postmodernist writings is to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the 'meaninglessness' of existence and the underlying 'abyss,' or'void,' or 'nothingness' on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended. Postmodernism in literature and the arts has parallels with the movement known as poststructuralism in linguistic and literary theory; poststructuralists undertake to subvert the foundations of language in order to show that its seeming meaningfulness dissipates, for a rigorous inquirer into a play of conflicting indeterminacies, or else to show that all forms of cultural discourse are manifestations of the ideology, or of the relations and constructions of power, in contemporary society.

**Feminist Criticism.** As a self-aware and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism was not inaugurated until late in the 1960s. Behind it, however, lie two centuries of struggle for women's rights, marked by such books as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), John Stuart Mill's The Subjection of Women (1869), and the American Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Feminist literary criticism continues in our time to be closely interrelated with the movement by political feminists for social, economic, and cultural freedom and equality.

An important precursor in feminist criticism was Virginia Woolf, who, in addition to her fiction, wrote *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and numerous other essays on women authors and on the cultural,

economic, and educational disabilities within what she called a 'patriarchal' society that have hindered or prevented women from realizing their creative possibilities. (See the collection of her essays, *Women and Writing*, ed. M. Barrett, 1979.) A much more radical critical mode was launched in France by Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), a wide-ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object, or 'Other,' to man as the defining and dominating 'Subject' who is assumed to represent humanity in general; the book dealt also with 'the great collective myths' of women in the works of many male writers. In America, modern feminist criticism began with Mary Ellman's deft and witty discussion, in *Thinking about Women* (1968), about the derogatory stereotypes of women in literature written by men, and also about the alternative and subversive points of view in some writings by women. Even more influential was Kate Millett's polemical and hard-hitting Sexual Politics, published the following year. By 'politics' Millett refers to the mechanisms that express and enforce the relations of power in society; she represents Western social arrangements and institutions as covert ways of manipulating power so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of men and the subordination of women. In her book she attacks the male bias in Freud's psychoanalytic theory, and also analyzes selected passages by D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, and Jean Genet as revealing the ways in which their authors, in fictional fantasy, aggrandize their aggressive phallic selves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects.

Since 1969 there has been an explosion of feminist writings without close parallel in the history of previous critical innovations, in a movement that, as Elaine Showalter has remarked, displays the urgency and excitement of a religious awakening. This current criticism, in America, England, France, and other countries, is not a unitary theory or procedure. It manifests, among those who practice it, a great variety of critical vantage points and procedures, including adaptations of *psychoanalytic*, Marxist, and diverse *post-structuralist* theories, and its vitality is signalized by the vigor (sometimes even rancor) of the debates within the ranks of professed feminists themselves. The various feminisms, however, share some assumptions and concepts that constitute a common ground for the diverse ways that individual critics explore the factor of sexual

difference and privilege in the production, the form and content, the reception, and the critical analysis and evaluation of works of literature:

1) The basic view is that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal (ruled by the father)-that is, it is male-centered and controlled, and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains: familial, religious, political, economic social, legal, and artistic. From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophy to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as the human norm, hence as an Other, or kind of non-man, by her lack of the identifying male organ, of male powers, and of the male character traits that are presumed, in the patriarchal view, to have achieved the most important inventions and works of civilization and culture. Women themselves are taught, in the process of their being socialized, to internalize the signing patriarchal ideology (that is, the conscious and unconscious presuppositions about male superiority), and so are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination.

2) It is widely held that while one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of gender-of the traits that constitute what is masculine and what is feminine-are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by the omnipresent patriarchal biases of our civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir: put it, 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. ... it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature .... which is described as feminine.' In this way the masculine in our culture has come to be identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine, by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional.

3) The further claim is that this patriarchal (or 'masculinist,' or 'andro-centric') ideology pervades those writings which have been considered great literature, and which until recently have been written almost entirely by men for men. Typically, the most highly regarded literary woks focus on male protagonists-Oedipus, Ulysses, Hamlet, Tom Jones, Captain Ahab, Huck Finn-who embody masculine traits and ways of feeling and pursue masculine

interests in masculine fields of action. To these males, the female characters, when they play any role, are marginal and subordinate, and are represented either as complementary to or in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. Such works, lacking autonomous female role models, and implicitly addressed to male readers, either leave the woman reader an alien outsider or else solicit her to identify against herself by taking up the position of the male subject and so assuming male values and ways of perceiving, feeling, and acting. It is often held, in addition, that the traditional aesthetic categories and criteria for analyzing and appraising literary works, although represented in standard critical theory as objective, disinterested and universal, are in fact infused with masculine assumptions, interests, and ways of reasoning, so that the standard rankings, and also the critical treatments, of literary works have in fact been tacitly but thoroughly gender-biased.

A major interest of feminist critics in English-speaking countries has been to reconstitute all the ways we deal with literature so as to do justice to female points of view, concerns, and values. One emphasis has been to alter the way a woman reads the literature of the past so as to make her not an acquiescent, but (in the title of Judith Fetterley's book published in 1978) The Resisting Reader; that is, one who resists the author's intentions and design in order, by a 'revisionary rereading,' to bring to light and to counter the covert sexual biases written into a literary work. Another prominent procedure has been to identify recurrent 'images of women' especially in novels and poems written by men. These are often represented as falling into two antithetic patterns. On the one side we find idealized projections of men's desires (the Madonna, the Muse of the arts, Dante's Beatrice, the pure and innocent virgin, the 'Angel in the House' that was represented by the Victorian poet Coventry Patmore); on the other side are demonic projections of men's sexual resentments and terrors (Eve and Pandora as the sources of all evil, destructive sensual temptresses such as Delilah and Circe, the malign witch, the castrating mother). While many feminist critics have decried the literature written by men for its depiction of women as marginal, docile, and subservient to men's interests and emotional needs and fears, some of them have also identified male writers who, in their view, have managed to rise above the sexual prejudices of their time sufficiently to understand

and represent the cultural pressures that have shaped the characters of women and forced upon them their negative or subsidiary social roles; the latter class is said to include, in selected works, such authors as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Samuel Richardson, Henrik Ibsen, and George Bernard Shaw.

A number of feminists have concentrated, not on the woman as reader, but on what Elaine Showalter calls gynocriticism-that is, a criticism which concerns itself with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works written by women, in all aspects of their production, motivation, analysis, and interpretation, and in all literary forms, including journals and letters. Notable books in this mode include Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (1975), on English and American novels of the past three hundred years; Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (1976), on major women novelists and poets in England, America, and France; Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (1977); and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). This last book stresses especially the psychodynamics of women writers in the nineteenth century. Its authors propose that the 'anxiety of authorship' that resulted from the stereotype that literary creativity is an exclusively male prerogative, effected in women writers a psychological duplicity that projected a monstrous counter figure to the heroine, typified by Bertha Rochester, the madwoman in Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*; such a figure is 'usually in some sense the *author's* double, an image of her own anxiety and rage.'

One concern of gynocritics is to identify what are taken to be the distinctively feminine subject matters in literature written by women-the world of domesticity, for example, or the special experiences of gestation, giving birth, and nurturing, or mother-daughter and woman-woman relations-in which personal and affectional issues, and not external activism, are the primary interest. Another concern is to uncover in literary history a female tradition, expressed by a subcommunity of women writers who were aware of, emulated, and found support in earlier women writers, and who in turn provide models and emotional support to their own readers and successors. A third undertaking is to show that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or 'subjectivity,' in thinking, feeling, valuing and perceiving oneself and the outer

world. Related to this is the attempt (thus far, without much agreement about details) to specify the traits of a 'woman's language or distinctively feminine *style* of speech and writing, in sentence structure, types of relations between the elements of a discourse, and characteristic figures and imagery. Some feminists have turned their critical attention to the great number of women's domestic and 'sentimental' novels, which are noted perfunctorily and in derogatory fashion in standard literary histories yet which dominated the market for fiction in the nineteenth century and produced most of the best-sellers of the time; instances of this last critical enterprise are Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) on British writers and Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America*, 1820-1870 (1978). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have written the later history of women's writings in No Man's Land: *The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (2 vols .; 1988-89).

The often-asserted goal of feminist critics has been to enlarge and reorder or in some instances entirely to displace, the literary canon-that is, the set of works which, by a cumulative consensus have come to be considered 'major' and to serve as the chief subjects of literary history, criticism, scholarship, and teaching (*see canon of literature*). Feminist studies have served to raise the status of many female authors hitherto more or less scanted by scholars and critics (including Anne Finch, George Sand, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Elizabeth Gaskell, Christina Rossetti, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Sidonie-Gabrielle Colette) and to bring into purview other authors who have been largely overlooked as subjects for serious consideration (among them Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Joanna Baillie, Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and a number of African-American writers such as Zora Neale Hurston), Some feminists have devoted their critical attention especially to the literature written by lesbian writers, or that deals with lesbian relationships in a heterosexual culture.

American and English critics have for the most part engaged in empirical and thematic studies of writings by and about women. The most prominent feminist critics in France, however, have been occupied with the 'theory' of the role of gender in writing, conceptualized within various *poststructural* frames of reference, above all Lacan's reworkings of Freudian *psychoanalysis* in terms of

Saussure's linguistic theory. English-speaking feminists, for example, have drawn attention to demonstrable and specific evidences that a male bias is encoded in our linguistic conventions; instances include the use of 'man' or 'mankind' for human beings in general, of 'chairman and spokesman for people of either sex, and of the pronouns 'he' and 'his' to refer back to ostensibly gender-neutral nouns such as 'God,' 'human being', 'child' 'inventor,' 'author,' 'poet' (see Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker, and Nelly Furman eds., *Women and Language in Literature and Society*, 1980). The sweepingly radical claim of French theorists, on the other hand, whatever their differences, is that all Western languages, in all their features, are utterly and irredeemably male-engendered, male-constituted, and male-dominated. Discourse, it is asserted, in a term proposed by Lacan, is 'phallogocentric'; that is, it is centered and organized throughout by implicit recourse to the phallus (used in a symbolic rather than a literal sense) both as its supposed 'logos,' or ground, and as its prime signifier and power-source. Phallogocentrism manifests itself in Western discourse not only in its vocabulary and syntax, but also in its rigorous rules of logic, its proclivity for fixed classifications and oppositions, and its criteria for what we take to be valid evidence and objective knowledge. The basic problem for the French theorists is to establish the very possibility of a woman's language that will not, when a woman writes, automatically be appropriated into this phallogocentric language, for such appropriation forces her into complicity with the linguistic features that impose on females a condition of marginality and subservience, or even of linguistic nonentity.

To evade this dilemma, Hélène Cixous posits the existence of an incipient 'feminine writing' (écriture feminine) which has its source in the mother, in that stage of the mother-child relation before the child acquires the male-centered verbal language. Thereafter, in her view, this prelinguistic potentiality in the unconscious manifests itself in those written texts which, abolishing all repressions, undermine and subvert the fixed signification, the logic, and the 'closure' of our phallocentric language, and open out into a joyous freeplay of meanings. Alternatively, Luce Irigaray posits a 'woman's writing' which evades the male monopoly and the risk of appropriation into the existing system by establishing as its generative principle, in place of the monolithic phallus, the diversity,

fluidity, and multiple possibilities inherent in the structure and erotic functioning of the female sexual organs and in the distinctive nature of female sexual experiences. Julia Kristeva posits a 'chora,' or prelinguistic, pre-Oedipal, and unsystematized signifying process, centered on the mother, that she labels 'semiotic.' This process is repressed as we acquire the father-controlled, syntactically ordered, and logical language that she calls 'symbolic.' The semiotic process, however, can break out in a revolutionary way-her prime example is avant-garde poetry, whether written by women or by men-as a 'heterogeneous destructive causality' that disrupts and disperses the authoritarian 'subject' and strikes free of the oppressive order and rationality of our standard discourse which, as the product of the 'law of the Father,' consigns women to a negative and marginal status.

In recent years a number of feminists have used poststructuralist positions and techniques to question the founding concepts of feminism itself. They point out the existence of differences and adversarial strands within the supposedly monolithic history of patriarchal discourse, and they emphasize the inherent linguistic instability in the basic conceptions of 'woman' or 'the feminine,' as well as the diversities within these supposedly universal and uniform female identities that result from differences in race, class, nationality, and historical situation. See Barbara Johnson, *A World of Difference* (1987); Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (1989); and *the essays in Feminism/ Postmodernism*, ed. Linda J. Nicholson (1990).

Feminist theoretical and critical writings, although recent in origin, expand yearly in volume and range. There exist a number of specialized feminist journals and publishing houses, almost all colleges and universities now have programs in women's studies and courses in women's literature and feminist criticism, and ever-increasing place is given to writings by and about women in literary anthologies, periodicals, and conferences. Of the many critical and theoretical innovations of the last several decades, the concern with the effects of sexual differences in the writing, interpretation, analysis, and assessment of literature seems destined to have the most prominent and enduring effects on literary history, criticism, and academic instruction, as conducted by men as well as by women.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Recall M. H. Abrams's quotation from T. S. Eliot which characterizes the method of James Joyce as reflecting 'the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history'. Dante's 'Inferno' provided an endless source of inspiration and imagery to nearly all major modernist writers of the early twentieth century. Do you see the working of this 'mythical method' in Dante's 'Inferno', Canto III? How?

2. Examine the use of such modernist techniques as the break in narrative continuity, unusual representation of character and human action, obscurity and allusiveness in the following:
   C. P. Cavafy's 'Ithaka'
   Bertolt Brecht's 'The Burning of the Books'
   Wislawa Szymborska's 'The End and the Beginning'.

3. What modernist traits do you discern in Albert Camus's 'The Guest'? How faithful to the modernist ethos is Camus's representation of human life?

4. 'Abyss,' 'Void,' 'Nothingness'. Abrams uses these words to characterize the existential strain in postmodernist thought. Examine Gogol's 'The Greatcoat' in the light of Abrams's comments.

5. Given that terms like 'anti-hero' and 'anti-story' are generally applied to both modernist and postmodernist fiction, examine the short fiction you have read in the European Writing course. Which of these stories answer most to the description of an 'anti-story' and which character(s) to that of an 'anti-hero'?

6. Comment on specific instances of language, description, or assumption where women are represented in demeaning ways in the texts you have read in the European Literature course. Begin with a fairly detailed reading of any one text of your choice, and go on to mention and comment briefly on other instances.

7. Comment on the gender sensitivity of the poet in 'Lot's Wife'.

8. Is 'The End and the Beginning' a specifically woman-centered view of war? Explore the feminist-pacifist concerns of this poem in comparison with the woman's view of war in Pirandello's 'War'.

9. How do patriarchal follies and biases (does Abrams discuss/ mention them?) fuel the anger of Andromache and Hecuba?

10. Comment on Ibsen's cast of characters in An Enemy of the People. How would this play fare if you applied the criterion of 'representation' in feminist literary thought?

# UNIT ELEVEN

## Marxist Criticism
### Terry Eagleton

**About the author** Terry Eagleton (b. 1943) is among the foremost Marxist commentators in England. He is also a reputed literary journalist, novelist, and playwright. Since 1969, Eagleton has held various appointments at Oxford University where he was appointed the Thomas Warton Professor of English and Literature in 1992. Eagleton has always maintained that literary criticism has an oppositional role to play in contemporary society, by which he means informed and intelligent opposition to absolutist institutions of the state including the university and public media.

**About the essay** Eagleton's Marxist theory of the text discounts both the traditional, aestheticist view that literature produces beauty and pleasure, and the traditional Marxian view that literary texts directly reflect social reality. Texts, argues Eagleton, produce ideology rather than merely reflect it. Literature is class-oriented because it is produced by writers who owe allegiance to class ideologies. A comic song that appears at the end of his collection, *Against the Grain*, reflects his predilection for the socially radical canon of English literature:

Chaucer was a class traitor
Shakespeare hated the mob
Donne sold out a bit later
Sidney was a nob.
There are only three names
To be plucked from this dismal set
Milton Blake and Shelley
Will smash the ruling class yet.

Eagleton's 'Marxist Criticism' is an edited excerpt from his Marxism and Literary Criticism published in 1976. It offers a corrective reading of Marxist criticism for the benefit of readers who want to know how Marxist principles and goals are relevant and useful to current theory. What Eagleton underscores throughout this essay is the strongly political character of what we read and how we read in today's world.

It is advantageous to list in order Eagleton's concerns in 'Marxist Criticism':

1 How Marxism understands history; the revolutionary character of this understanding

2. In any society, its economic structure is the base. The material life of society means how people live, what they do for a living, what goods and services they produce at what cost and for whose benefit. On this base, society builds a superstructure. The forms of superstructure are visible in such institutions or forms as law, politics, state, religion, literature, morality etc.
3. Art (literature and other arts) belongs to the superstructure of a given society.
4. Art produces and sustains ideology, the social consciousness or mentality of a group, or a community.
5. In order to understand literature, one must understand 'the total social process'-how society organizes itself through relations of money, political power, dominance, class superiority, ideology, etc. Literature is a way of seeing the world; we must see it only as such.
6. Ideology determines, regulates, and perpetuates class-relations. Ideology decides the 'high' and the 'low', the 'good' and the 'bad' of what society produces including its cultural productions.
7. Ideology is neither simple nor easily perceived. We begin to perceive it when we begin to critically examine social and economic relations, study classes, and how they stand in relation to one another.
8. It is not to be understood that the base reflects the superstructure which produces literature. There is no direct correlation between the highest material conditions and the highest artistic achievements of any society.
9. The need to think of 'history' in wider terms than our own politics (which is 'contemporary history')

10. The Marxist belief that the base and superstructure are nearly ‘ autonomous; at the same time, Marxism, believes that art is determined by the materialist base of production. There is, of course, discrepancy in these beliefs.

11. Eagleton’s example of The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot. This example is given in order to see whether the discrepancy noted above is apparent or real. A vulgar Marxist reading of *The Waste Land* will see Eliot’s poem as a reflection of the spiritual emptiness and exhaustion of bourgeois ideology/ the cause of which is the First World War. What this reading, however, neglects are: (a) the poem as a product of economic relations within a capitalist regime; (b) the social situation of the poet- a clerk in-a commercial bank-while the poem was.written; and (c) the class-relations of English society of the 1920s.

12. Marxist criticism,’according to Eagleton, is interested in ‘the unique *conjuncture*’ of elements that make up both the *base* and *superstructure*. Each literary text has a history of mediated relations within the society of its production. Marxist criticism is engaged in studying these relations when it reads a text.

    Relationship between ‘literature’ and ‘ideology’. It is useful to remember at the very outset that both terms, literature’, and ‘ideology’ are extremely contentious and nettlesome.. Eagleton uses them in specific senses, depending on the arguments he forwards and the distinctions he wants to make.

    The more troublesome ‘ideology’ is used here in two distinct, but related senses:

13. Ideology is abstract and false thought; it is an illusion fostered by the ruling class. Ideology is also a set of ideas that arises from a set of material interests. hjIt is the system of ideas appropriate to classes such as ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’. In Marxist theory, the bourgeois ideology.is incorrect and reactionary; the latter, correct and progressive.

14. Eagleton’s definition: Ideology is not a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas, and images which tie them to their social functions .

15. All art, according to Eagletion, is ‘ideological’ in that it owes its existence to some ideology or the other. It is not easy, however, to answer the question how art bears its relationship to ideology.

16. Literature expresses ideology and transcends the limits set by ideology. Eagleton agrees with Louis Althusser that it is foolish to regard art as simply reflecting or summarizing a given ideology. Literature is capable of distancing itself from its ideology as well.

17. Pierre Marcherey's distinction-Illusion and Fiction. How art (literature) presents illusion through the fiction it creates, and how art 'contributes to our deliverance from the ideological illusion'.

18. Eagleton's proposal for a scientific analysis of society and its artistic works. 'A scientific criticism,' according to Eagleton, 'would seek to explain the literary work in terms of the ideological structure of which it is part...'. The finest Marxist criticism is therefore, an attempt to see literature both as part of the ideology which makes it, and apart from the ideology from which it distances itself.

Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature', concerned with how novels get published and whether they mention the working class, Its aim is to *explain* the literary work more fully; and this means a sensitive attention to its forms, styles and meanings.[1] But it also means grasping those forms, styles and meanings as the products of a particular history. The painter Henri Matisse once remarked that all art bears the imprint of its historical epoch, but that great art is that in which this imprint is most deeply marked. Most students of literature are taught otherwise: the greatest art is that which timelessly transcends its historical conditions. Marxist criticism has much to say on this issue, but the 'historical' analysis of

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[1] Much non-Marxist criticism would reject a term like 'explanation', feeling that it violates the 'mystery' of literature. I use it here because I agree with Pierre Macherey. In his *Pour Une Théorie de la Production Littéraire* (Paris, 1966), that the task of the critic is not to 'interpret' but to 'explain'. For Macherey, 'interpretation' of a text means révising or correcting it in accordance with some ideal norm of what it should be; it consists, that is to say, in refusing the text as it is. Interpretative criticism merely redoubles' the text, modifying and elaborating it for easier consumption.

literature did not of course begin with Marxism. Many thinkers before Marx had tried to account for literary works in turns of the history, which produced them: and one of these, the German ideaiist philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, had a profound influence on Marx's own aesthetic thought. The originality of Marxist criticism, then, lies not in its historical approach to literature, but in its revolutionary understanding of history itself.

## BASE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

The seeds of that revolutionary understanding are planted in a famous passage in Marx and Engels's *The German Ideology* (1845-6):

> The production of ideas, concepts and consciousness is first of all directly interwoven with the material intercourse of man, the language of real life. Conceiving, thinking, the spiritual intercourse of men, appear here as the, direct etflux of men's material behaviour ... we do not proceed from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as described, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at corporeal man; rather we proceed from the really active man ... Consciousness does not determine life; life determines consciousness.

A fuller statement of what this means can be found in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859):

> In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, *relations of production* which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive *forces*. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellecrual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but on the contrary, theit social being that determines their consciousness.

> The social relations between men, in other words, are bound up with the way they produce their material life. Certain productive forces-say, the organisation of labour in the middle ages -- involve the social relations of villein to lord we krow as feudalism. At a later

stage, the development of new modes of productive organisation is based on a changed set of social relations-this time between the capitalist class who owns those means of production, and the proletarian class whose labour-power the capitalist buys for profit. Taken together, these 'forces' and 'relations' of production form what Marx calls 'the economic structure of society', or what is more commonly known by Marxism as the economic 'base' or 'infrastructure'. From this economic base, in every period, emerges a 'superstructure'-certain forms of law and politics, a certain kind of state, whose essential function is to legitimate the power of the social class which owns the means of economic production. But the superstructure contains more than this: it also consists of certain 'definite forms of social consciousness' (political, religious, ethical, aesthetic and so on), which is what Marxism designates as ideology. The function of ideology, also, is to legitimate the power of, the ruling class in society; in the last analysis, the dominant ideas of a society are the ideas of its ruling class.[2]

Art, then, is for Marxism part of the 'superstructure' of society. It is (with qualifications we shall make later) part of a society's ideology -- an element in that complex structure of social perception which ensures that the situation in which one social class has power over the others is either seen by most members of the society as 'natural', or not seen at all. To understand literature, then, means understanding the total social process of which it is part. As the Russian Marxist critic Georgy Plekhanov put it: 'The social mentality of an age is conditioned by the age's social relations. This is nowhere quite as evident as in the history of art and literature[3]. Literary works are not mysteriously inspired, or explicable simply in terms of their authors' psychology. They are forms of perception, particular ways of seeing the world; and as such they have a relation to that dominant

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[2] This, inevitably, is a considerably over-simplified account. For a full analysis, see N. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (London, 1973) .

[3] Quoted in the preface to Henri Arvon's *Marxist Aesthetics* (Cornell, 1973).

way of seeing the world which is the 'social mentality' or ideology of an age. That ideology, in turn, is the product of the concrete social relations into which men enter at a particular time and place; it is the way those class-relations are experienced, legitimized and perpetuated. Moreover, men are not free to choose their social relations; they are constrained into them by material necessity-by the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic production.

To understand *King-Lear, The Dunciad* or *Ulysses* is therefore to do more than interpret their symbolism, study their literary history and add footnotes about sociological facts which enter into them. It is first of all to understand the complex, indirect relations between those works and the ideological worlds they inhabit -- relations which emerge not just in 'themes' and 'preoccupations', but in style, rhythm, image, quality and ... *form*. But we do not understand ideology either unless we grasp the part it plays in the society as a whole-how it consists of a definite, historically relative structure of perception which underpins the power of a particular social class. This is not an easy task, since an ideology is never a simple reflection of a ruling class's ideas; on the contrary, it is always a complex phenomenon, which may incorporate conflicting, even contradictory, views of the world. To understand an ideology, we must analyse the precise relations berween different classes in a society: and to do that means grasping where those classes stand in relation to the mode of production ....

## LITERATURE AND SUPERSTRUCTURE

It would be a mistabe to imply that Marxist criticism moves mechanically from 'text' to 'ideology' to 'social relations' to 'productive forces', It is concerned, rather, with the *unity* of these 'levels' of society. Literature may be part of the superstructure, but it is not merely the passive reflection of the economic base. Engels makes this clear, in a letter to Joseph Bloch in 1890:

> According to the materialist conception, of history. the determining element in history is *ultimately* the production and reproduction in real life.

More than this neither Marx nor I have eve asserted. If therefore somebody twists this into the statement that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms it into a meaningless, abstract and absurd phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure-political forms of the class struggle and its consequences, the nature and stage of development of their mode of economic forms of law-and then even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the combatants: potitical, legal, and philosophical theories, religious ideas and their further development into systems of dogma-also. exercise their inflrence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their *form*.

Engels wants to deny that there is any mechanical, one-to-one correspondence between base and superstructure; elements of the superstructure constandly react back upon and influence the economic base. The materialist theory of history denies that art can in itself change the course of history; but it insists that art can be an active element in such change. Indeed, when Marx came to consider the relation between base and superstructure, it was art which he selected as an instance of the complexity and indirectness of that relationship:

In the case of the arts, it is well known that certain periods of their flowering are out of all proportior to the general development of society, hence also to the material foundation, the skeletal structure, as it were, of its organisation. For example, the Greeks compared to the moderns or also Shakespeare. It is even recognised that certain forms of art, e.g. the epic can no longer be produced in their world epoch-making, classical stature as soon as the production of art, as such, begins: that is, that certain significant forms within the realm of the arts are possible only at an undeveloped stage of artistic development. If this is the case with the relation berween different kinds of art within the realm of art, it is already less puzzling that it is the case in the relation of the entire realm to the general development of society. The difficulty consists only in the general formulation of these contradictions. As soon as they have been specified, they are already clarified .[4]

Marx is considering here what he calls 'the unequal relationship of the development of material production ... to artistic production'.

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[4] Introduction to the Grundrisse (Harmondsworth, 1973)

It does not follow that the greatest artistic achievements depend upon the highest development of the productive forces, as the example of the Greeks, who produced major art in an economically undeveloped society, clearly evidences. Certain major artistic forms like the epic are only *possible* in an undeveioped society. 'Why then, Marx goes on to ask, do we still respond to such forms, given our historical distance from them ?:

But the difficulty lies not in understanding that the Greek arts and epic are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and that in a certain respect they count as a norm and as an unattainable model.

Why does Greek art still give us aesthetic pleasure? The answer which Marx goes on to provide has been universally lambasted by unsympathetic commentators lamely inept:

A man cannot become a child again, or he becomes childish, But does he not find joy in the child's naivete, and must he himself not strive to reproduce its truth at a higher stage? Does not the true character of each epoch come alive in the nature of its children? Why should not the historic childhood of humanity, its most beautiful unfolding, as a stage never to return, exercise an eternal charm? There are unruly children and precocious children. Many of the old peoples belong in this category .. The Greeks were normal children. The charm of their art for us is not in contradiction to the undeveloped stage of society on which it grew. (It) is its result, rather, and is inextricably bound up, rather, with the fact that the unripe social conditions under which it arose, and could alone rise, can never return.

So our liking for Greek art is a nostalgic lapse back into childhood-a piece of unmaterialist sentimentalism which hostile critics have gladly pounced on. But the passage can only be treated thus if it is rudely ripped from the context to which it belongs-the draft manuscripts of 1857, known today as the *Grundrisse*. Once returned to that context, the meaning becomes. instantly apparent. The Greeks, Marx is arguing, were able to produce major are not *in spite of but because* of the undeveloped state of their society. In ancient societies, which have not yet undergone the fragmenting 'division of Iabour' known to capitalism, the overwhelming of 'quality' by

'quantity' which results from commodity-production and the restless, continual development of the productive forces, a certain 'measure' or harmony can be achieved between man and Nature-a harmony precisely dependent upon the *limited* nature of Greek society. ..

Two questions, then emerge from Marx's formulations in the *Grundrisse*... The first concerns the relation between 'base' and 'superstructure'; the second concerns our own relation in the present with past art. To take the second question first: how can it be that we moderns still find aesthetic appeal in the cultural products of past, vastly different societies? In a sense, the answer Marx gives is no different from the answer to the question: How is it that we moderns still respond to the exploits of, say, Spartacus? We respond to Spartacus or Greek sculpture because our own history links us to those ancient societies; we find in them an undeveloped phase of the forces which condition us. Moreover, we find in those ancient societies a primitive image of 'measure' between man and Nature which capitalist society necessarily destroys, and which socialist society can reproduce at an incomparably higher level. We ought, in other words, to think of 'history' in wider terms than our own contemporary history. To ask how, Dickens relates to.history is not just to ask how he relates to Victorian England, for that society was itself the product of a long history which includes men like Shakespeare and Milton. It is a curiously narrowed.view of history which defines it merely as the 'contemporary moment' and relegates all else to the 'universal'. One answer to the problem of past and present is suggested by Bertolt Brecht who argues that 'we need to develop the historical sense.... into a real sensual delight. When our theatres perform plays of other periods they like to annihilate distance, fill in the-gap, gloss over the differences. But what comes then of our delight in comparisons, in distance, in dissinlarity-which is at the same time a delight in what is close and proper to ourselves?"[5]

The other problem posed by the *Grundrisse* is the relation between base and superstructure. Marx is clear that these two aspects of society

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[5] Appendices to the 'Short Organum on the Theatre', in J. Willet (ed.), *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic* (London, 1964).

do not form a *symmetrical* relationship, dancing a harmonious minuet hand-in-hand throughout history. Each element of a society's superstructure-art, law, politics, religion-has its own tempo of development, its own internal evolution, which is not reducible to a mere expression of the class struggle or the state of the economy. Art, as Trotsky comments, has 'a very high degree of autonomy'; it is not tied in any simple one-to-one way m the mode of production. And yet Marxism claims too that, in the last analysis, art is determined by that mode of production. How are we to explain this apparent discrepancy?

Let us take a concrete literary example. A 'vulgar Marxist' case about T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* might be that the poem is directly determined by ideological and economic factors-by the spiritual emptiness and exhaustion of bourgeois ideology which springs from that crisis of imperialist capitalism known as the First World War This is to explain the poem as an immediate 'reflection' of those conditions; but it clearly fails to take into account a whole series of 'levels' which 'mediate' between the text itself and capitalist economy. It says nothing, for instance, about the social situation of Eliot himself-a writer living an ambiguous relationship with English society, as an 'aristocratic' American expatriate who became a glorified City clerk and yet identified deeply with the conservative-traditionalist, rather than bourgeois-commercialist, elements of English ideology. It says nothing about that ideology's more general forms-nothing of its structure, content, internal complexity, and how all these are produced by the extremely complex class-relations of English society at the time. It is silent about the form and language of *The Waste Land* -- about why Eliot, despite his extreme political conservatism, was an avant-garde poet who selected certain 'progressive' experimental techniques from the history of literary forms available to him, and on what ideological basis he did this. We learn nothing from this approach about the social conditions which gave rise at the time to certain forms of 'spiritualliy', part-Christian, part-Buddhist, which the poem draws on; or of what role a certain kind of bourgeois anthropology (Frazer) and bourgeois philosophy (F. H. Bradley's idealism) used by the poem fulfilled in the ideological formation of the period. We are uniliuminated about Eliot's social position as an

artist, part of a self-consciously erudite, experimental elite with particular modes of publication (the small press, the little magazine) at their disposal; or about the kind of audience which that implied, and its effect on the poem's styles and devices. We remain ignorant about the relation berween the poem and the aesthetic theories associated with it-of what role that aesthetic plays in the ideology of the time, and how it shapes the construction of the poem itself.

Any complete understanding of The Waste Land would need to take these (and other) factors into account. It is not a matter of reducing the poem to the state of contemporary capitalism; but neither is it a matter of introducing so many judicious complications that anything as crude as capitalism may to all intents and purposes be forgotten. On the contraty: all of the elements I have enumerated (the author's class-position, ideological forms and their relation to literary forms, 'spirituality' and philosophy, techniques of literary production, aesthetic theory) are directly relevant to the base/superstructure model. What Marxist criticism looks for is the unique conjuncture of these elements which we know as *The Wast Land*.[6] No one of these elements can be conflated with another: each has its own relative independence. *The Waste Land* can indeed be explained as a poem which springs from a crisis of bourgeois ideology, but it has no simple correspondence with that crisis or with the political and economic conditions which produced it. (As a poem, it does not of course know itself as a product of a particular ideological crisis, for if it did it would cease to exist. It needs to translate that crisis into 'universal' terms-to grasp it as part of an unchanging human condition, shared alike by ancient Egyptians and modern man.) *The Waste Land's* relation to the real history of its time, then, is

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[6] To put the issue in more complex theoretical terms: the influence of the economic 'base' on *The Waste Land* is evident not in a direct way, but in the fact that it is the economic base which in the last instance determines the state of development of each element of the superstructure (religious, philosophical and so on) which went into its making, and moreover determines the structural interrelations between those elements, of which the poem is a particular conjuncture.

highly *mediated*; and in this it is like all works of art.

## LITERATURE AND IDEOLOGY

Frederick Engels remarks in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy* (1888) that art is far richer and more 'opaque' than political and economic theory becaure it is less purely ideological. It is important here to grasp the precise meaning for Marxism of 'ideology'. Ideology is not in the first place a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their roles in class-society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their social functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole. In this sense The Waste Land is ideological: it shows a man making sense of his experience in ways that prohibit a true understanding of his society, ways that are consequently false. All art springs from an ideological conception of the world; there is no such thing, Plekhanov comments, as a work of art entirely devoid of ideological content. But Engels' remark suggests that art has a more complex relationship to ideology than law and political theory, which rather more transparently embody the interests of a ruling class. The question, then, is what relationship art has to ideology.

This is not an easy question to answer. Two extreme, oppusite positions are possible here. One is that literature is *nothing but* ideology in a certain artistic form-that works of literature are just expressions of the ideologies of their time. They are prisoners of 'false consciousness', unable to reach beyond it to arrive at the truth. It is a position characteristic of much 'vulgar Marxist' criticism, which tends to see literary works merely as reflection of dominant ideologies. As such, it is unable to explain, for one thing, why so much literature actually *challenges* the ideological assumptions of its time. The opposite case seizes on the fact that so much literature challenges the ideology it confronts, and makes this part of the definition of Literary art irself. Authentic art, as Ernst Fischer argues in his significantly entitled

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[7] In his 'Letter on Art in reply to Andre Daspre', in *Lenin and Philosophy* (London, 1971)

*Art Against Ideology* (1969), always transcends the ideological limits of its time, yieiding us insight'into the realities which ideology hides from view.

Both of these cases seem to me too simple. A more subtle (although still incomplete) account of the relationship between literature and ideology is provided by the French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser.7 Althusser argues that art cannot be reduced to ideology: it has, rather, a particular *relationship* to it. Ideology signifies the imaginary ways in which men experience the real world, which is, of course, the kind of experience literature gives us too-what it feels like to live in particular conditions, rather than a conceptual analysis of those conditions. However, art does more than just passively reflect that experience. It is held within ideology, but also manages to distance itself. from it, to the point where it permits us to feel' and 'perceive' the ideology from which it springs. In doing this, art does not enable us to *know* the truth which ideology conceals, since for Althusser 'knowledge' in the strict sense means *scientific* knowledge-the kind of knowledge of, say, capitalism which Marx's *Capital* rather than Dickens's *Hard Times* allows us. The difference between science andrart is not that they deal with different objects, but that they deal with the same objects in different ways. Science gives us conceptuai knowledge of a situation; art gives us the experience of that situation, which is equivalent to ideology. But by doing this, it allows us to 'see' the nature of that ideology, and thus begins to move us towards that full understanding of ideology which is scientific knowledge.

How literature can do this is more fully developed by one of Althusser's colleagues, Pierre Macherey. In his *Pour Une Théorie de la Production Littéraire* (1966), Macherey distinguishes between what he terms 'illusion' (meaning, essentially, ideology), and 'fiction'. Illusion the ordinary ideological experience of men-is the material on which the writer goes to work; but in working on it he transforms it into something different, lends it a shape and structure. It is by giving ideology a determinate form, fixing it within certain fictional limits, that art is able to distance itself from it, thus revealing to us the limits of that ideology. In doing this, Macherey claims, art contributes to our deliverance from the ideological illusion.

I find the comments of both Althusser and Macherey at crucial "points ambiguous and obscure; but the relation they propose between literature and ideology is nonetheless deeply suggestive. Ideology, for both critics, is more than an amorphous body of free-floating images and ideas; in any society it has a certain structural coherence, Because it possesses such relative coherence, it can be the object of scientific analysis; and since literary texts 'belong' to ideology, they too can be the object of such scientific analysis, A scientific criticism would seek to explain the literary work in terms of the ideological structure of which it is part, yet which it transforms in its art: it would search out the principle which both ties the work to ideology and distances it from it. The finest Marxist criticism has indeed done precisely, that; Macherey's starting-point is Lenin's brilliant analyses of Tolstoy. To do this, however, means grasping the literary work as *a formal* structure; and it is to this question that we can now turn.

Questions for Discussion

1. What does Terry Eagleton mean by saying that 'Marxist criticism is not merely a 'sociology of literature'?

2. What, according to Eagleton, is the relationship between literature and ideology?

3. How does Eagleton show that Marxist criticism is concerned with the unity of levels and categories such as 'text', 'ideology', 'social relations', and 'productive forces'?

UNIT TWELVE

# What Postmodernism Means

## Lawrence Cahoone

**About the author** Lawrence Cahoone teaches philosophy at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Masachusetts. Author of books on philosophical and cultural theories, Cahoone has also edited *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology* (Blackwell, 2003). "What Postmodernism Means' forms part of the 'Introduction' to the anthology.

**About the essay** Since the 'postmodern' is generally understood as an unfinished and continuing phenomenon, it is generally seen as a further stage of development of, or advancement on, the 'modern'. Whether one sees it as a sign of dissolution marking the end of the 'modern', or even as a different set of continuities from the 'modern', the 'postmodern' is understood very clearly in terms of, or in contradistinction to, the 'modern.'

Your understanding of postmodernism will, therefore, depend on your understanding of modernism. Understanding modernism as a fixed age or phenomenon helps, so that one could speak of its post (meaning 'after'), of its transition to postmodernism, its successor. (A period is usually perceived both in terms of continuity and discontinuity).

The essay, 'What Postmodernism Means' recognizes this problem of definition at the outset. While the terms 'modern', 'modernism', and 'modernity' are still being debated, extensions of this debate are natural when one considers what 'postmodernism' means.

If attaching a precise date to modernism is difficult, it is equally difficult to propose cover dates for postmodernism, a stage or condition in which, we believe, we find ourselves. Postmodernism,

therefore, is not a unified concept, or movement. It brings together a large number of opposed and opposing views and concerns (themes): its views debate rather than establish what it is; it makes claims and argues why we see so many versions; of It. In other words, postmodernism is an ongoing argument about what it is, why so many versions of it exist, and each pursues different methods and goals in its inquiry. It is perhaps profitless to insist on what precisely postmodernism means but it would be more useful to look at the efforts it makes in various directions, to observe how successful its efforts are in understanding our world.

The terms modernism and postmodernism within the literary context are glossed by M. H. Abrams helpfully. It is, however, advantageous to remember that there are three broad formulations of this phenomenon, each inspired by a leading theorist. These formulations are as follows:

Fredric Jameson, and theorists inspired by his formulations, believe that postmodernism is the culture that comes into being with the development of 'late Capitalism' of multinational corporations and free-market economies in the west since the,end of the Second World War.

Jean Baudrillard and his followers believe that postmodernism emerges with the developments in communication technologies that have taken place through the 1980s.

Those influenced by the theories of Jean-François Lyotard think that postmodernism is less a historical period/movement than a disruption of the historical periodization of modernity's grand narratives.

It is difficult-some would say, impossible-to summarize what postmodernism means, not only because there is much disagreement among writers labelled postmodern, but also because some postmodernists would deny having any doctrines or theories, at all. Perhaps the very idea of a summary is antithetical to postmodernism. Still, understanding must begin somewhere, and there is no good alternative to listing: first, the most famous themes or ideas that appear in most postmodernist work; second, the different kinds of claims that postmodernists make; and last, some of the issues that divide postmodernists.

Five prominent postmodern themes can be distinguished; four are objects of its criticism, and one constitutes its positive method. Postmodernism typically criticizes: *presence* or presentation (versus representation and construction), *origin* (versus phenomena), *unity* (versus plurality), and *transcendence* of norms (versus their immanence). It typically offers an analysis of phenomena through *constitutive otherness*.

*Presence* refers to the quality of immediate experience and to the objects thereby immediately 'presented.' What is directly, immediately given in experience has traditionally been contrasted both with representation, the sphere of linguistic signs and concepts, and construction, the products of human invention, hence whatever is mediated by the human factor. So, for example, perception or sensation or sense data have been considered, at various times, as immediate conduits for reality, more reliable or certain than mental contents subsequently modified, represented and altered by thought or language. Postmodernism questions and sometimes rejects this distinction. It denies that anything is 'immediately present,' hence independent of signs, language, interpretation, disagreement etc. In some cases, it argues that presentation actually presupposes representation. Thus Derrida literally denies that there is such a thing as, 'perception,' that is, an immediate, transparent reception of the given.

The denial of presence occasionally leads postmodernists to substitute the analysis of *represeniations* of a thing for discussion of *the thing*. For example, in a debate over whether to use intelligence tests in a local school system, a postmodernist might produce a long analysis of how, the term 'intelligence' has been used by the test's proponents, implying that the object or referent of the term 'intelligence' is never present to us, so it is the history of those representations and their political use which is really at issue. The critique of presence is sometimes expressed by saying that,' There is nothing outside the text.' This need not mean that there is no real world, but that we only encounter real referents through texts, representations, mediation. We can never say what is independent of all saying.

*Origin* is the notion of the sources of whatever is under consideration, a return to which is often considered the aim of rational inquiry. Inquiry into origins is an attempt to see behind or beyond phenomena to their ultimate foundation. I or modern philosophies of the self (e.g. existentialism, psycho analysis, phenomenology, even Marxism), the attempt to discover the origin of the self is the road to authenticity. Postmodernism in the strict sense denies any such possibility. It denies the possibility of returning to, recapturing, or even representing the origin, source, or any deeper reality behind phenomena, and casts doubt on or even denies its existence. In a sense, postmodernism is intentionally superficial, not through eschewing rigorous analysis, but by regarding the surface of things, the phenomena as not requiring a reference to anything deeper or more fundamental. Nietzsche's claim that the ancient Greeks were superficial 'out of profundity' could be a postmodern slogan. The saying, 'Every author is a dead author,' is an example of the denial of origin, because it denies that the meaning of a text can be 'authoritatively' revealed through reference to authorial intentions. An author's intentions are no more relevant to understanding the text than any other set of considerations: they are not the 'origin' of the text and so have no 'privilege' over other factors.

Virtually in every kind of intellectual endeavour, postmodernism tries to show that what others have regarded as a *unity*, a single, integral existence or concept, is plural. This is to some extent a reflection of structuralism, which understood cultural elements-words, meanings, experiences, human selves, societies-as constituted by relations to other elements. Since such relations are inevitably plural, the individual in question is plural as well. Everything is constituted by relations to other things, hence nothing is simple, immediate, or totally present, and no analysis of anything can be complete or final. For example, a text can be read in an indefinitely large number of ways, none of which provides the complete or true meaning. The human self is not a simple unity hierarchically composed, solid, self-controlled: rather it is a multiplicity of forces or elements. It would be more true to say that I have *selves*, than *a self*.

The denial of the *tronscendence* of norms is crucial to postmodernism. Norms such as truth, goodness, beauty, rationality

are no longer regarded as independent of the processes they serve to govern or judge, but are rather products of and immanent in those processes. For example, where most philosophers might use the idea of justice to judge a social order, postmodernism regards that idea as itself the product of the social relations that it serves to judge: that is, the idea was created at a certain time and place, to serve certain interests and is dependent on a certain intellectual and social context, etc. This greatly complicates any claims about the justice of social relations. It is in effect the rejection of idealism, and of any dualism which asserts that some things (e.g. norms) are independent of nature or semiosis (sign-production) or experience or social interests. The concept 'good' and the act of calling something good are not independent of the things we want to call 'good.' This leads postmodernists to respond to the normative claims of others by displaying the processes of thought, writing, negotiation, and power which produced those very normative claims. It does not mean that postmodernists fail to make their own normative claims, but that they unleash a form of critical analysis which makes all normative claims problematic, including their own.

Lastly, there is a characteristic strategy of many forms of postmodernism, which is the complex application of the four themes just mentioned: The strategy is to use the idea of *constitutive otherness* in analyzing any cultural entity. What appear to be cultural units - human beings, words, meanings, ideas, philosophical systems, social organizations- are maintained in their apparent unity only through an active process of exclusion, opposition, and hierarchization. Other phenomena or units must be represented as foreign or 'other' through representing a hierarchical dualism in which the unit is 'privileged' or favoured, and the other is devalued in some way. For example, in examining social systems characterized by class or ethnic division, postmodernists will discover that the privileged groups must actively produce and maintain their position by representing or picturing themselves-in thought, in literature, in law, in art-as not having the properties ascribed to the under-privileged groups, and must represent those groups as lacking the properties of the privileged groups. In a human psyche, the self may feel compelled to represent itself as excluding sexual or aggressive feelings, which, however,

cannot simply be obliterated, and so must be ascribed to chance situations, to idiosyncratic events (e.g. 'I was not myself that day'), etc. In a philosophical system, a dualism like that between 'reality', and 'appearance' involves the construction of a kind of waste basket into which phenomena that the system does not want to sanctify with the privileged term 'real' can be tossed (mere 'appearances') Only in this way can the pristine integrity of the idealized or privileged term be maintained.

Metaphorically, this can be expressed by saying that it is the *margins that constitute the text*. Apparent unities are constituted by repressing their dependency on and relations to others. Consequently the informed analyst will attend to the apparently excluded or 'marginalized' elements of any system or text: Postmodernists, especially in literary studies, turn their attention away from the well known, openly announced themes in a text toward the seldom mentioned, the virtually absent, the implicitly or explicitly devalued For presence is constituted by absence, the real is constituted by appearance, the ideal by the mundane. This applies not only to the stated message or theme of a text, but to its style as well. Linguistic tropes, such as metaphors, which other readers may take as secondary or peripheral to the meaning of a text, are read by postmodernists as crucial to the constitution of the text's privileged theme:

Sometimes implicit and sometimes explicit in this kind of analysis through constitutive otherness is the claim that the process of exclusion or repression is false, unstable, and/or immoral: false in that it is mendacious, a lie; unstable in that the repression must sooner or later be admitted, forcing an acceptance of the excluded factors into the representation of the privileged unit; immoral when it takes the form of social oppression. Every text is built on some kind of exclusion or repression, hence it belies itself and, when read carefully, undermines its own message. Once we become aware of the constitutive otherness in the text, we see that the text itself, despite its own intentions, alerts us to the dependence of the privileged theme on the marginalized element. The repressed eventually returns to haunt us. Social disenfranchisement, marginalization of sexual and racial groups, is the moral and political case of this pattern. Some

postmodernists wish to remove such repression, while others, seeing in that wish a longing for an impossible authenticity, admit that there is no escape from repression and hope only to render repressive forces more diverse and fluid, so that none becomes monopolistic and hence excessively onerous.

Regarding the types of postmodernism, while no categorization can be adequate to capture the diversity among postmodernists, a three-part classification can make most of this material easier to digest. The categories are not mutually exclusive, they are intentionally overlapping. They merely indicate the kinds of aims that can be embodied by writing called postmodern.

*Historical* postmodernism argues that the social and or political and/or cultural organization of modernity has changed fundamentally, so that we now face a novel world. This is simply the basic historical claim of postmodernism, or better, it is postmodernism *as* an historical claim. Modernity is at an end, or is undergoing a deep transformation This claim can be applied to any kind of subject matter, social, cultural, artistic, or theoretical. It need not make any normative claims, that is, it need not say that modernity was wrong.

*Methodological* postmodernism rejects the possibility of establishing the foundations, hence the ultimate reliability, of knowledge understood as valid in a realist sense, that is, knowledge claimed to represent the true, independent 'real' nature of its objects. It shows that traditional philosophical distinctions between real and ideal, objective and subjective, reality and appearance, fact and theory, are problematic.' It does this on the basis of criticizing either traditional theories of knowledge and linguistic meaning, or the human interests evident in the constriction of these distinctions .. Methodological postmodemism is antirealist---claiming that knowledge is made valid not by its relation to its objects, but by its relation to our pragmatic interests, our communal perspectives, our needs, our rhetoric, and so on---and/or antifoundationalist---undercutting the philosophical attempt to justify realism. Some forms of methodological postmodernism appear to undermine the very possibility of rational inquiry, by subjecting the very notions of 'truth,' 'rationality,' and 'meaning' to critique. Methodological postmodernism is purely

negative, that is, it claims or shows the inadequacy or problematic nature of other forms of writing and talking and theorizing, but does not explicitly offer an alternative.

*Positive* postmodernism is a positive reinterpretation of any phenomenon on the basis of the foregoing methodological critique. It may reconceive the self, or God, or nature, or knowledge, or society, or art, or anything, given the critique of unity, origin, presence, etc. This category refers to writing that applies general postmodern themes to particular subject matters in order to offer a new vision or understanding of them. It offers an alternative.

There are several important issues that divide writers associated with postmodernism. First, implicit in the categorization above, one must recognize whether any alleged postmodernist is: (a) merely making the historical claim that modern ideas and methods are being superseded or abandoned in the present age; (b) questioning.the validity of modern methods without making any explicit claims about their falsity or suggesting that they be abandoned; or (c) claiming the inadequacy of the modern methods and inviting us to abandon them in favour of something else. Some of the thinkers, labelled postmodern are wrongly accused of rejecting modern philosophy and society, when in fact they are only questioning them, albeit radically, or only reporting their obsolescence, without suggesting that modernity be exchanged for some alternative. For example, while Jacques Derrida has been interpreted as undermining all of Western thought, Derrida specifically states that there is no alternative to 'logocentrism,' or the traditional foundationalism of the West: it cannot be abandoned. If this is true, then Derrida's critique, and other forms of methodological postmodernism, begin to look similar to various forms of skepticism familiar within the Western tradition (e.g, of the ancient Greek Sextus Empiricus and the eighteenth-cuntury Scotsman David Hume).

As a result there is a tension between methodological postmodernism and various positive applications of postmodernism. The most extreme case is that some self-labelled postmodernists are speculative metaphysicians who use elements of the postmodern critique to reformulate fundamental concentions of God and the

universe. This task is in principle anathema to poststructuralism and antifoundationalism, and hence to much of what goes under the name 'postmodernism.' But the speculators have as much right to the name as anyone, and they clearly do base their work on some notions shared with other postmodernists. Still, they avoid those elements of methodological postmodernism which effectively undermine any speculative project.

Second, while postmodernism may seem antithetical to any attempt to recapture the past, this is not always true. For example, while most postmodernists in philosophy or social theory would have nothing in common with those who wish to reincorporate elements of tradition, such a return is precisely what architectural postmodernism means. The postmodern architect often incorporates ornamentation that modernism had banished into an otherwise modernist setting, But notice that this is not premodernism pure and simple; rather it is a kind of pluralism. Architectural postmodernism uses premodern elements without a whole that is anything but traditional. Synthesizing, juxtaposing, and ironically commenting on traditions is *not* traditicnal. To be a traditionalist or premodernist is to be faithful to *one* tradition, not all traditions. To respect and sample from all traditions is precisely to be modern and cosmopolitan, not traditional. Traditionalism is no more compatible with a plurality of tradidons than monogamy is compatible with a plurality of sexual partners. Nevertheless, postmodernism may often exhibit similarities to premodernism since they share the same enemy.

Third, there is the question of the political implications of postmodemism. Its most well-known political manifestation is the attempt to make contemporary culture acknowledge and respond to 'difference,' or 'otherness,' under the names of *feminism*, a vastly influential intellectual movement, and *multiculturalism*, which as a programme has been primarily a phenomenon in the field of education. Both of these movements overlap with postmodernism, so that some feminists and some multiculturalists are postmodernists while others are not. Most poststructuralists, feminists, and multiculturalists are associated with the left. But others are not, like Richard Rorty, who has labelled himself a postmodernist bourgeois

liberal.' Indeed, some critics from the left have criticized postmodernism for just this, that it opens the way to reactionary forces or to an acquiescence in the status quo, by undermining the modernist justifications for leftist political reform. Hence Jurgen Habermas once called the French poststructuralists the Young Conservatives.' There is nothing confusing about this diversity; it is arguable that postmodernism by itself need not lead in any particular political direction. Its political usefulness lies in criticizing any established authority.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Why is 'the very idea of summary antithetical to postmodernism'? Substantiate.

2. Why does postmodernism criticize presence or presentation ?

3. Account for the preference for plurality in postmodernist thinking.

4. How does postmodernism deny transcendence? Why does it do so?

5. What is 'constitutive otherness'? Illustrate with reference to a text you have read in this course

6. What do you understand by the following?
   a. Historical postmodernism
   b. Methodological postmodernism
   c. Positive postmodernism

7. What political implications of postmodernism can you discern? Illustrate with reference to any one of them.

# Part One

# Section D: Drama

UNIT THIRTEEN

# Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*
## Discussion and Questions

**About the author** Sophocles (circa 496-406 BC) is still considered to be the foremost among the dramatists of classical Greek. His tragedies are representative of an era of democracy and the emancipated individual. 'Sophoclean tragedy' is identified basically by its protagonists, mostly heroes, who are not mere victims but develop during the course of the drama into proud bearers of their tragic fate. They learn to accept their fate with tremendous courage and strength. The weakness (or 'tragic flaw') lies mostly within the person, and the gods are simply the helpers of the righteous and cursers of those who overstep their human limitations. The flaw is 'tragic' because it is a guiltless guilt, an ancient curse that is not within man's power to escape. Oedipus's life is an example of this.

**About the play** *Oedipus Rex (Oedipus, the King)* tells us the story of Oedipus who is not chiefly the cursed victim of an old prophecy but an example, a symbol, of human weakness in general, ewho atones for his tragic, guiltless guilt. He unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. Oedipus, however, accepts this guilt heroically by a voluntary, courageous, though desperate, deed he blinds himself.

## The Human Value of Oedipus Rex

*Oedipus Rex* is often claimed to be the greatest among the tragedies of Sophocles because its action rises in one great crescendo, making it a play of extreme tension. Oedipus rules the action here, which communicates the significance of his tragic fate. The play does not treat the crucial events of the story (Oedipus's murder of his father,

his marriage with his mether) as central, but allow us to see their aftermath. What we witness are stages in the learning of a terrible mistake committed in the past by a well-meaning person—the gradual disclosure of dreadful deeds performed in ignorance by the hero. This is the profoundly human value of this tragedy.

Sophocles, in other words, focuses on a human situation where we find a person to be most vulnerable and helpless for all his other strengths and advantages. In this situation We are able to see the essence of his being, the duality of his nature. His strength and weakness are at war with each other.

## Conflict

If conflict is the soul of drama, *Oedipus Rex* is rich in conflict, which is mostly psychic and internal. Oedipus suspects, and then realizes what the outcome of his investigation will be, but persists in finding out the truth about his parents. Another source of conflict is Oedipus's confrontation with his conscience, externalized and objectified in the characters of Kreon and Tiresias. Both speak harsh words and do not spare Oedipus's feelings as long as Oedipus is insistent that truth be known.

## Symbolic Significance

*Oedipus Rex* suggests through powerful symbolic action that man's strength can become his real weakness. The harder the investigation, the harsher the truth that results from it. The play thus becomes a sy mbolic portrayal of the arduous and unpleasant quest man must undertake in order to learn about himself, the hard way he must negotiate until he gains insight into the nature of his being

Note how vision, seeing, sight and insight are crucial in understanding the significance of Oedipus Rex. Literally seeing or *not* seeing, is only part of the play's significance. Symbolically, *Oedipus Rex* shows us that man does not see everything, and cannot see far back into the past, when he has perfect eyesight. The blind Tiresias has 'seen' more but he is not believed. Oedipus blinds himself in expiation of his guilt of not seeing enough of/about himself. This act has a deep symbolic undertone.

## Sophoclean Irony

Sophocles is credited with the masterfui use of a form of irony called *Tragic* or *Dramatic Irony*. In the Greek plays we have characters who speak words or perform actions whose true significance (another level of meaning) is not quite accessible to them. To the audience, however two or more meanings, other than the one which the character seems to know, are available. Put differently, the audience often feels more knowledgeable about the import of words and actions of certain characters in plays. The following passage is one among the several in *Oedipus Rex* remarkable for the, use of dramatic irony:

Oedipus: As for the criminal, I pray to God-
Whether it be a lurking thief, or one of a number-
I pray that that man's life be
consumed in evil and
wretchedness.
(Scene 1).

(We wonder: is Oedipus cursing another person or himself? What does he know?)

Questions for Discussion

1. What role does the Chorus play in *Oedipus Rex*? Examine the choric passages closely.

2. Write a note on Tiresias's meeting with Oedipus.

3. Tiresias: Listen to me. You mock my blindness, do you?
But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind.
These lines are addressed to Oedipus. Ccmment on the dramatic irony of such passages in Oedipus Rex.

4. What role does Kreon play in Oedipus Rex? Explain.

UNIT FOURTEEN

# Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*
## Discussion and Questions

**About the author** Henrik Johan Ibsen (1828-1906) was a Norwegian poet and playwright. He has written many plays that debate socio-political issues and the fate of the individual, who tries to grapple with them for his/her sustenance or survival.

**About the play** *En folkefiende* (An Eneiny of the People, English translation, 1890) of 1883 is a caustic and high-spirited comedy in five acts. Its lead character is Dr. Thomas Stockmann. Ibsen projects the courage of his individual conscience in opposition to the conformity of mass opinion as admirable in the play.

*An Enemy of the People* is set in a small Norwegian resort, which is a coastal town. Dr. Stockmann claims that he possesses undisputable evidence that the town's spa is polluted. Its waters, he discovers, have been polluted by effluents from a tannery in the vicinity. Dr. Stockmann is the town's public health officer. He is determined to bring this truth to public notice and have the situation remedied. Initially he is aided enthusiastically by the local newspaper's crusading editors. The tide of reform, however, gradually ebbs when Peter, the doctor's brother and the Mayor of the town, points out the hardship that would result from giving up a financially viable tourism project and undertaking cleaning operations.

The local community will not accept a truth that denies them their livelihood. Dr. Stockmann is, therefore, ostracized and stripped of his privileges as a doctor. He is branded 'an enemy of the people' Majority opinion turns violent. Dr. Stockmann's house is stoned. His daughter is dismissed from her job as a teacher. His friends are persecuted. The doctor first considers emigration, then resolves to found a school. He is committed as ever to truth and justice. At his

school he teaches his sense of values to young people. He derides social hypocrisy into which people are led by the so-called respectable elements in town. Dr. Stockmann firmly believes that 'the strongest man in the world is the one who stands most alone'.

## Dr. Stockmann's Idealism

There is one passage in *An Enemy of the People* where Dr. Stockmann seems to equate physical pollution and infectious disease in his town with spiritual laziness, backwardness, and dishonesty of the community of which he is part: 'I have said that I would speak of the great discovery I have made within the last few days-the discovery that all our sources of spiritual life are poisoned and that our whole society rests upon a pestilential basis of falsehood.' These are very strongly pessimistic and desperate words spoken by a person who has virtually given up all effort to reform his community. Even' Ibsen famously admitted to the muddle-headedness of his idealist hero.

The larger point, however, should not be overlooked. Opposition spurs rather than hinders Dr. Stockmann. This is a trait Ibsen seems to have shared with his character. Ibsen believed that the 'compact majority' must be led and spiritually uplifted by able and strong individuals who believe in progress. Of course idealism makes Dr. Stockmann stubborn and unrelenting, for he believes that no scientific truth can be challenged or ignored. No scientific truth, however, has any validity apart from human truth. The presiding irony of the play is that Dr. Stockmann never realizes this.

## Problem Play

Ibsen built his plays around the climax, interwove exposition with action so artfully that the audience hardly realize that they are being briefed. The problem play owes its idea entirely to Ibsen. A problem play dramatizes controversial social questions, especially those related to the emancipation of women, sexual mores, family relationships, personal and business ethics, etc

In *An Enemy of the People*, the problem of a society whose life is 'rooted in a lie' is extended to include the conflict between might

of the world. Another related problem here is the venality of small-town politics represented in the characters of journalists of the People's Tribune, and of Peter Stockmann, the Mayor who believes that 'the public has no need for new ideas'.

## Contemporary Relevance

For anyone who doubts the contemporary relevance of *An Enemy of the People*, a reminder of some themes Ibsen touches or in passing is necessary: ecological pollution, arms race, scams and scandals involving government officials, the social role and responsibilities of the press and public media, the social obligation of biomedical research etc.

Questions for Discussion

1. **Is Dr. Thomas Stockmann an anarchist and an aristocrat? Substantiate.**

2. **What is Dr. Stockman's flaw-naïvete or idealism ? Explain.**

3. **What impression of popular journalism and the press do you** gather from *An Enemy of the People*?

4. What do you think are Ibsen's views on militancy based on your reading of *An Enemy of the People*?

5. Why is *An Enemy of the People*, despite the seriousness of its issues, not a tragedy?

6. 'An unreasonable idealist.' Does this description suit Dr. Stockmann? State your reasons with adequate examples from *An Enemy of the People*.

# Part Two Non-Europen Writing

## Section A: Poetry

# UNIT ONE

## All the Generations Before Me

### Yehuda Amichai

**About the poet** Yehuda Amichai (b. 1924) is a German Jew whose family fled the Nazis and emigrated to Palestine in 1936. His education was in Jerusalem and he fought the Second World War and the Israeli War of Independence. He has written novels and plays and has taught from time to time in American universities. Amichai is known for his deeply spiritual and philosophical writing, and his ironic reflections on man's destiny in a world of divisions and hierarchies.

**About the poem** 'All the Generations Before Me' is a remarkably personal reflection of a man and artist in a specific space and time: Jerusalem and the twentieth century. It reflects on the *self* of a person and artist that can claim very little as its own. The poem speaks of the self as a sum of what tradition, history, political circumstances, economic conditions, and socio-cultural situations have made of it. Considered thus, everything binds- your ancestry, place of birth and upbringing, name, age, material conditions, etc. The poem wonders what other life could a self have when everything binds it to the realities of society and history it cannot gainsay or ignore.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- Yehuda Amichai knows the experience of displacement, exile, and reconstituted identity. This experience is peculiar to the diaspora, which is the term used to describe the scattering of the Jews to countries outside of Palestine after the Babylonian captivity. Diaspora also describes the body of Jews living in countries outside Palestine or modern Israel.

- Underlying the themes of generational split and new responsibilities is also the vexed question of remembering and forgetting. What binds you to the past (tradition, custom, convention, old habits and practices) is remory. What if the person (here, the poet) chooses to forget, or not remember?

- Consider also whether memory is a binder, a 're-binder', or onversely, a loosener of life's values and properties. For remembrance is not always natural or automatic as we imagine. (Why does the poet consider the possibility of his death in the lines, 'Were I in Auschwitz …' ?). Is not your life made possible by your ability to recall and reminisce? How does that bind you to life?

All the generations before me
donated me, bit by bit, so that I'd be
erected all at once
here in Jerusalem, like a house of prayer
or charitable institution.
It binds. My name's
my donors' name
It binds.

I'm approaching the age
of my father's death. My last
will's patched with many patches.
I have to change my life and death
daily to fulfill all the prophecies
prophesied for me. So they're not lies.
It binds.

I've passed forty.
There are jobs I cannot get
because of this. Were I in Auschwitz
they would not have sent me out to work,

but gassed me straightaway.
It binds.

*Translated from Hebrew by Harold Schimmel*

## Glossary

generations

*a whole body of people born about the same time in succession. The words genus, gene, gender, engender, genre and genetics are all related to generation, a detail useful to remember in the context of this poem [< Latin, generare = beget].*

Jerusalem

*the capital of Israel. It is the holy city of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In 1948, Jerusalem was divided between Israel and Jordan, but Israel took the whole city during a war in 1967 called the Six-Day War. Yehuda Amichai took part in this war.*

binds

*in many senses such as: 'fastens', 'uttaches', 'holds together. with,' 'imposes constraint/duty upon', etc. All these, and other meanings, apply. What is meant is that the nature of 'binding' changes with every thought about Jerusalem, the holy city to which the poet is attached by tradition, lineage, language, religion, history and politics. Each of these binds him to Jerusalent.*

My name's/my donor's name

*'Yehuda', a variant of 'Yehudi' meaning 'of Yahıveh or Yahweh (Jehovah)', the God of the Old Testament. The poet is a Jew. The Jews believe that Israel is*

| | |
|---|---|
| | *their home, no matter where they live, and that no one else has any claim to Jerusalem, their holy city. It is also significant that the poet changed his original surname Pfeuffer to Amichai, meaning 'My people live.'* |
| patched with many patches | *made up of fragments of many kinds (referring to experiences).* |
| prophecies | *reference to the Jewish belief that God gave the Law to Moses; the Jews are entitled to the Promiscd Land (Genesis, 12.7 etc,)* |
| Auschwitz | *a town in South West Poland; the site of Nazi concentration camp during the Second World War.* |

## Questions for Discussion

1. What relationships other than the poetic does 'All the Generations Before Me' suggest? Analyse the poem to show that a poet's ties are not merely literary.

2. Is Yehuda Amichai's poem an address to future generations? Explain.

# UNIT TWO

## A Far Cry from Africa

### Derek Walcott

**About the poet** Derek Walcott was born in St. Lucia in 1930. His earliest poems appeared in the West Indies during the 1940s. He is among the foremost Anglophone poets in the Caribbean and has distinguished himself as a world-renowned playwright and essayist as well. Since his *Collected Poems* of 1986, he has published a few more collections of poetry and prose and a major epic poem. called *Omeros* a rewriting of Homer's classic, in 1990. Walcott won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992.

**About the poem** 'A Far Cry from Africa' is from Walcott's first major collection of poems, *In a Green Night* (1962). A reflexive poem, 'A Far Cry from Africa' is an honest effort to understand the poet's vocation, his relationship with the world at large, and with his country of birth. In this poem Walcott asks several questions, mostly to himself, in a bid to understand himself, his country, and the politics and colonial subjugation that has divided his life profession, and loyaities.

The poem is divided into three verse-paragraphs, each adding a line more to the *one preceding* it. The mounting fury of dislocation and helplessness is reflected by the accumulation of details and self-annlysis that offes no apparent solution. From a general survey of the land and its gruesome reality (1), through a reflection on violence and death (2), the thinking fastens ultimately on the self and its utter helplessness as a witness to this tragic history of colonialism.

The title puns on the poet's unenviable lot. He must cry from Africa---the land so far away from the colonizer who cannot or will not hear him. In any case, the poet's Africa is a far cry (very

different) from England, the land of the oppressor, the largest empire in the world.

A wind is ruffling the tawny pelt
Of Africa. Kikuyu, quick as flies,
Batten upon the bloodstreams of the veldt.
Corpses are scattered through a paradise.
Only the worm, colonel of carrion, cries:
"Waste no compassion on these separate dead!"
Statistics justify and scholars seize
The salients of colonial policy.
What is that to the white child hacked in bed?
To savages, expendable as Jews?

Threshed out by beaters, the long rushes break
In a white dust of ibises whose cries
Have wheeled since civilization's dawn
From the parched river or beast-teeming plain.
The violence of beast on beast is read
As natural law, but upright man
Seeks his divinity by inflicting pain.
Delirious as these worried beasts, his wars
Dance to the tightened carcass of a drum,
While he calls courage still that native dread
Of the white peace contracted by the dead.

Again brutish necessity wipes its hands
Upon the napkin of a dirty cause, again
A waste of our compassion, as with Spain,
The gorilla wrestles with the superman.
I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live?

## Glossary

| | |
|---|---|
| tawny | *tawny, yellowish-brown* |
| Pelt | *hide (humorously, the skin of a human being if you think of Africa as 'human')* |
| Kikuyu | *Kikuyu grass, native to Southern Africa* |
| batten | *thrive by feeding upon; fatten* |
| the veldt | *also spelt veld, the open country of grass fields, bushes, and shrubs* |
| colonel of carrion | *the alliteration of /k/ adds to the grim humour of the description in which the worm has a fairly senior military rank* |
| these separate dead | *it is pointless to ask who has made the dead separate, in all the following senses:*<br><br>*1.detached, disconnected*<br>*2.distinct from each other*<br>*3.distant and dispersed*<br>*4.parted, and apart from us, the living* |
| the salient | *conspicuous, easily seen or recognized details* |
| expendable as Jews | *as 'worthless' and 'insignificant' as the Jews had been to the Nazis* |

| | |
|---|---|
| rushes | *grass-like plants with pithy or hollow stems, usually found in marshes* |
| ibises | *birds (like herons or storks) that wade in tropical marshes. Mark how the scene shifts from carcasses to the animals, although the speaker cannot forget the violence of Africa.* |
| But upright man … pain | *The sense is ironic here. The British pride, themselves in their uprightness. (Now who is the 'beast on beast'?)* |
| The tightened carcass of a drum | *another suggestion of both human violence and exploitation. Percussion instruments (like the drum) have tightly stretched membranes across their 'heads that derive from the hide of animals. Also the connection between the war-dances of Africa, and the colonial wars for subjugation in the name of civilizing the natives, is hard to miss.* |
| Contracted by the dead | *ironic, as if the death of black Afiica were a term for the contract of peace offered by white Britain. Also, mark how 'dread' rhymes with 'dead' by way of a mock resolution.* |
| Brutish necessity … dirty cause | *a very powerful and effective image matching brutish means with dirty ends Remember that all wars have 'causes" that are, in fact, the material necessities (territory, gold, oil, cheap labour etc.) of the aggressor.* |

As with Spain

I who am poisoned …
divided to the vein

*allusion to the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) and the earlier colonizations in South America*

*This is the very heart of the poet's reflection. Walcott is sensibie and sensitive enough to avoid hypocrisy and a vain postcolonial posturing. Colonial history has given him a mixed blood; it has forged in many Africans like him a peculiar relationship with England and its white people. He is courageous enough to say that his compassion extends to the stupidity of the whites and the waste of the blacks. That compassion reaches us through the colonizer's language, English.*

*The last six lines of the poem state Walcott's dilemma more clearly and pithily than his essay 'The Muse of History' where he says: 'Most black writers cripple themselves by their separatism. You can't be a poet and believe in the division of man.'*

Questions for Discussion

1. **Comment on Derek Walcott's imagery of brutal violence and death in 'A Far Cry from Africa'.**

2. **How suggestive is Walcott's title' Far Cry from Africa'? How deeply far does it sound when its voice issues from the *self* of the poet?**

3. **What portrait of the postcolonial writer does Derek Walcott present in 'A Far Cry from Africa'**

UNIT THREE

# Tonight I can Write...

## Pablo Neruda

**About the poet** Known worldwide for his passionate commitment to leftist poetics and radical poetics, Pablo Neruda (1904-1973) held consular appointments in Burma, Ceylon, and Spain. He met and made friends with such writers as Garcia Lorca, Rafael Alberti, and Miguel Hernandez who greatly influenced his thinking and writing. In Paris and Mexico, Neruda served as a diplomat, and later in 1971, he was appointed Chile's ambassador to France by Salvador Allende. The same year he won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

**About the poem** 'Tonight I Can Write ... ' is the twentieth and the last of the poems in *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción deseperada (Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair*) which Neruda published in 1924. During the twenties, this volume of lyrics shocked the public by its shameless eroticism and bold public experiments in the form and style that challenged the genteel tradition of the Hispanic lyric.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- The traditional love poem is addressed to a lover. It takes the form of a complaint, mild teasing or banter, playful accusation, and some deep reflection on the vagaries of life and love, time and death. Does Neruda's lyric answer to these conventions?

- Why is 'Tonight' special for the poet? Do memory and longing for 'her' make it special? Reflections on distance and longing lend a peculiar charm to this poem, but the poet seems to be giving a unique interpretation to the 'loss' he recognizes.

- It is interesting that the lover says that 'I no longer love her, that's certain … 'How crucial is' Love is so short, forgetting is so long' to our understanding of this poem?

- There are some lines in this poem that exemplify Neruda's unusual treatment of the age-old subject of love. Identify them.

- This poem is a monologue. It occasionally gives us the impression that the poet is speaking to himself and to an absent lover. The poet can also be critical of himself or his poem, as when he tells us at the beginning that he can 'Write, for example, "The night is shattered/and the blue stars shiver in the distance." 'Does this stance make 'Tonight I can Write …' metapoetic?

- For all his affected gesture and critical detachment from his work, Neruda manages to convey a quality that is often lacking in some bad samples of traditional love poetry-the quality of sincerity and conviction.

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
Write, for example : The night is shattered
and the blue stars shiver in the distance.'

The night wind revolves in the sky and sings

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
I loved her, and sometines she loved me too .

Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.
I kissed her  again and again under the endless sky.

She loved me, sometimes I loved her too.
How could one not have loved her great still eyes.

Tonight I can write, the saddest lines.
To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.

To hear the immense night, still more immense without her.
And the verse falls to the soul like dew to the pasture.

What does it matter that my love could not keep her.
The night is stattered and she is not with me.

This is all. In the distance someone is singing. In the distance.
My soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

My sight searches  for find her as though to bring her closer.
My heart looks for her, and she is not with me.

The same night whitening the same trees.
We, of that time, are no longer the same.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but how I loved her.
My voice tried to find the wind to touch her hearing.

Another's. She will be another's. Like my kisses before.
Her voiceher bright body. Her infinite eyes.

I no longer love her, that's certain, but maybe I love her.
Love is so short, forgetting is so long.

Because through nights like this one I held her in my arms
my soul is not satisfied that it has lost her.

Though this be the last pain that she makes me suffer
and these the last verses that I write for her.

*Translated from Spanish*

Questions for Discussion

1. How does Pablo Neruda build a confessional intimacy in 'Tonight I can Write ...' ?

2. Show how Neruda aligns digressive thought with a certain order and logic of plain discourse in 'Tonight I can Write ... '.

UNIT FOUR

# Journey to the Interior

## Margaret Atwood

**About the poet** Canadian poet, novelist, and essayist Margaret Atwood (b. 1939) grounds her work on certain mythic structures of consciousness, particularly defined by gender, nationalism, and power-relations. The best of her poems are characterized by the brilliance and spareness of her meditations.

**About the poem** The 'Journey to the Interior' is a classic example of Atwood's method: slow, meditative advance; thoughtful and self-correcting revisions and qualifications; refusal to be taken in by apparent likenesses; and most importantly, the place of the self seen most clearly in relationship to things, persons, and phenomena that seem to define it.

'Journey to the Interior' divides itself into three stages in a meditative reflection in which Atwood is engaged. First, the similaritiès; second, the differences; and finally, the exit from this ruminative exercise which might prove most difficult for those who indulge fancies and let themselves be carried away by apparent surfaces and the 'realities' they proffer. For the meditative mind is a maze from which it is hard to come out. The 'interior,' after all, is not certainly all straight and bright. Many able explorers have lost their way in this maze, the interior landscape of.the meditative mind.

The verse paragraph: of the poem helpfully mark these three ideas. The metaphors of 'the Interior' include an unknown landmass, prairies (large, open grasslands in North America) a jungle, a room in which you stay for a while, and the mind itself.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- At the simplest level, Atwood's poem might suggest that she is contemplating about, or telling us, the possible challenge of exploring Canada. The second largest country in the world, Canada covers about four million square miles. In spite of this vast size, two-third of the Canadians live in a narrow belt of land no more than 120 miles (200 km) from the US border. Is the poem an invitation to explore the unknown interior of Canada?

- Canada is, however, by no means 'a poor country' It is one of the ten most important industrial nations in the world. Which country, then, is Atwood's subject? Is her journey' a metaphor for geographical exploration in an alien land?

- Atwood's poem is perhaps an allegory. It tells us that the search for truth or reality always follows a familiar method. You begin with similarities and differences, with the known and easy to grasp. But do we reach the unknown or unseen that easily? No. In any exploration, the poet says, the known itself might take on strange shapes and forms. We begin to understand the 'known,' so called, as something entirely alien or new.

- That the *mind*, rather than a specific land mass, is 'the Interior' becomes clear when you read the poem all over again. Mark the following words/phrases:

  *wall*
  *by hand*
  *point to point*
  *a dotted/line on a map*
  *plotted*
  *reliable*
  *compass*

Now, consider the last lines:
it is easier for me to lose my way/forever here, than in other landscapes.

For the landscape of the mind, the list of words / phrases above provides pointers, or instruments/objects whose, help, we require for comprehending unknown spaces, Geographical or topographical mapping helps us know a territory in advance, but it is virtually impossible to develop a cartography for the mind.

- The journey to this interior, which is the mine, is further complicated by the fact that that man must make its own map. It is virtually impossible to do that unless one can put mind out of one's mind (stop thinking about one's mind), Hence the poet's modest realization that 'whatever I do I must/keep my head'.

There are similarities
I notice: that the hills
which the eyes make flat as a wall, welded
together, open as I move
to let me through; become
endless as prairies; that the trees
grow spindly, have their roots
often in swamps; that this is a poor country;
that a cliff is not known
as rough except by hand, and is
therefore inaccessible. Mostly
that travel is not the easy going
from point to point, a dotted
line on a map, location
plotted on a square surface
but that I move surrounded by a tangle
of branches, a net of air and alternate
light and dark, at all times;
that there are no destinations
apart from this.

There are differences
of course: the lack of reliable charts;

more important, the distraction of small details:
your shoe among the brambles under the chair
where it shouldn't be; lucent
white mushrooms and a paring knife
on the kitchen table; a sentence
crossing my path, sodden as a fallen log
I'm sure I passed yesterday
(have I been
walking in circles again?)

but mostly the danger:
many have been here, but only
some have returned safely.
A compass is useless; also
trying to take directions
from the movements of the sun,
which are erratic;
and words here are as pointless
as calling in a vacant
wilderness.
Whatever I do I must
keep my head. I know
it is easier for me to lose my way
forever here, than in other landscapes

## Questions for Discussion

1. Comment on Margaret Atwood's language of indirection and irony in 'Journey to the Interior'.

2. Why does the poet of 'Journey to the Interior' think that 'it is easier for me to lose my way/forever here …' ? Explain with specific examples from the text.

# UNIT FIVE

## Aborginal Man...

Albert Namatjira

**About the poet** Albert Namatjira (1902-1959) is a well-known aboriginal painter in Australia. His poem has no title, a detail not to be missed given the peculiar and unenviable status of the aboriginal peoples, the earliest residents of Australia.

**About the poem** 'Aboriginal' literally means 'inhabiting or existing in a land from the earliest times; living in a place long before the arrival of intruders/colonists.' Ab origine in Latin means, 'from the beginning'.

The 'pride' and 'joy' of the first stanza originates from the aborigine's direct and unmediated relationship with his nature. A model of perfect being, the aboriginal man is famed for his natural ways and disregard for what others think of him. The second stanza advances the aboriginal man's story. The white colonists now try to tame him by imposing their rules, setting their standards of conduct and achievement. A pity, because nature's man was only follcwing the law of his clan by sharing his resources with white intruders. The third stanza reflects on the machinations of the colonists. Flattery and kindness mask their real intentions. Namatjira, the artist, also falls a prey to the western acclaim and publicity his art draws. Remember that the colonies always looked forward to British appreciation and recognition. The British press have always advertised and encouraged the best artists and writers of their colonies.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

It might help to read some good discussions of aboriginal cultures of Australia. The following passage is from Ruby Langford (Ginibi)'s essay called 'The Oppressed People,' a strong plea for the restitution of aboriginal cultural traditions and institutions in modern Australia:

> They [the British] came with their religion, bibles in hand, to civilize us savages. Heathens, they thought we were, nomads who roamed this land, forever seeking food and nourishment from the earth mother, the earth we had lived in unity with for forty thousand years. They came, only because they didn't understand us or our culture, to change our ways to their ways, white ways, white ideas, lording it over us. But who were they to decree, what was right and what was wrong, forever changing us to their ways, foreign ways, they came. We had laws and rules to abide by, we had, a spirituality more spiritual than theirs. We had family clans, all one people. We danced together played together, lived together, hunted the roo and the possum together, and stayed together. They came to destroy everything secred to us, they came to annihilate us, but we survival and are still here.
>
> We live and so does our culture and we will stand together and fight for our rights in this country, the land of our ancestors and the earth mother.

Aboriginal man, you walked with pride.
And painted with joy the countryside.
Original man, your fame grew fast,
Men pointed you out as you went past.

But vain the honour and tributes paid
For you strangled in rules the white man made:

You broke no law of your own wild clan
Which says, 'share all with your fellow-man.'

What did their loud acclaim avail
Who gave you honour, then, gave you jail?
Namatjira, they boomed your art,
They called you genius, then broke your heart.

Questions for Discussion

1. What understanding of 'aboriginality' do you gain from Namatjira's short poem ?'
2. Examine the rhyme-scheme of Namatjira's poem. What rhyme's reason can you propose for those effects? (Hint: paid/made; clan/man. What ideas does the poet link and reinforge by his rhymes?)

UNIT SIX

# The Wind-Up Doll

## Forugh Farrokhzad

**About the poet** -Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967) was a West Asian poet. In her short life she published four collections of poetry and one long poem. Keenly sensitive to political and ideological biases in Middle-Eastern societies, Farrokhzad expressed herself quite forcefully as is evident in 'The Wind-Up Doll' an excoriating speech by a woman who wonders whether 'modern' societies would ever think of other roles for their women.

**About the poem** 'The Wind-Up. Doll' seems to advance the idea of woman-as-object through its images and metaphors. Although the poet does not specificaily mention the media and markets, it is worthwhile asking how a variety of socio-cultural messages converge on the female body in order to shape it in ways desirable to men and man-governed institutions is of prestige and power.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- Every verse-paragraph here uses the phrase 'One can' at least once with a certain monotonous regularity. The effect it produces is certainly monotony, and unrelleved apathy in the actions, and statements made on them. So much so that the implication of 'One can' is hard to miss-why a woman, but any object in her place can as well say or do these things.

One can ... ' but how long? is a question we might feel urged to ask. Also, why should one? When will this anonymous 'one' (representing all people, and no one individual in particular) become a responsible, identifiable self in society?

- The poem's striking figures of speech (and thought) often turn out to be weak, old, half-active, defunct, inorganic, or plain dead things' a cup,' 'a faded flower,' 'faint slogans,' 'wrinkled fingers.' 'rickety cart', etc. What additional effect do such metaphors/similes supply to the woman's reflections?
  Half-way through the poem, we confirm the voice here as gendered (clue: verse-paragraph 5).

- Social, educational and religious institutions as well as the family and peer-group exercise varying degrees of pressure on the young woman to conform. 'Love,' significantly, is the key word that masks gentle, polite gestures of persuasion or pressure, no matter whether love is given or received as reward.

- The 'virtues' of a woman, according to an arrant male ethos, are easy to list, but note that this poem links those ' virtues' to objects whose use one either takes for granted, or those that are freely usable and disposable:

  *Stay silent*
  *watch, eyes of glass*
  *Stand motionless*
  *cry out … 'l love … '*
  *be … a beautiful, healthy female/*
  *with a body …*
  *kneel [with bent head]*
  *see God in a grave*
  *[be] constant [like a zero]*
  *hide with shame …*
  *mingle with images*
  *be a wind-up doll*
  *say' Ah, how happy I am!'*

- Cultural forces in every modern (westernized) society have been trying to shape women's bodies in insidious ways. While notions of gender difference are cartled by the body, attitudes, desires practices and intentions of a culture enjoin on women

certain conventions chiefly in terms of their appearance, deportment and physical activity.

More than this, yes
much more than this, one can stay silent.

One can with a fixed gaze
like that of the dead
stare for long hours at the shape of a cup
at a faded flower on the rug
at faint slogans on the wall.

One can draw back the curtain
with wrinkled fingers and watch
rain falling in the alley
a child standing in a doorway
with colourful balloons
a rickety cart in a noisy rush
leaving the deserted square.

One can stand motionless
by the curtain, but blind, but deaf.

One can stand cry out
with a voice quite false, quite remore
'l love …'
One can in a man's dominating arms
be a beautiful,healthy female
with a body like a leather tablecloth
with two big hard breasts
one can in bed with a drunk, a madman, a tramp
rape the innocence of love.

One can degrade with guile
all the deep mysteries

one can keep on solving crossword puzzles
happily discover the inane answers
yes, five or six letters.

One can with bent head
kneel for a lifetime before a cold shrine
one can see God in a nameless grave
one can trade believing for a worthless coin
one can moid in the corner of a mosque
like an old reciter of pilgrim's prayers.

One can like zero be constant
whether adding, subtracting or multiplying
one can think of one's eye in its cocoon of anger
the pale buttonhole of an old shoe
one can in one's basin dry up like water.

One can hide with shame the beauty of a moment
at the bottom of a chesh.
like a funny black snapshot
one can hang in a day's empry frame
the image of an execution, a martyrdom or a crucifixion
one can cover the crack in the wall with masks
one can mingle with images more hollow than these.

One can be like a wind-up doll
and look at the world with eyes of glass
one can lie for years in lace and tinsel
a body stuffed with straw
in a felt-lined box,
one can at every lustful pass
cry out for no reason and say
'Ah, how happy I am!'

*Translated from Persian by Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak*

## Questions for Discussion

1. Consider Farrokhzad's The Wind-Up Doll' as a critique of gender bias and oppressive male power. Discuss a couple of metaphors here that lend force to the poet's critique.

2. How does irony function in 'Thu Wind-Up Doll'? How does this device prompt the urgency of an alternative lifestyle for the woman?

UNIT SEVEN

# A Prison Evening

## Faiz Ahmad Faiz

**About the poet** Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-1984) was born in Punjab, although he migrated to Pakistan where he worked as a journalist. In 1951 Faiz was arrested for suspected involvement in the Rawalpindi conspiracy. He spent four years in prison in the early 1950s, and was jailed again by the Bhutto government in 1958. Faiz is remembered for his daring and sophisticated use of Arabic and Persian poetic forms. Inspired by socialist ideals and radical thinking, Faiz has written hundreds of poems in which conventional themes and images take on new revolutionary gusto and splendour. His love poems are both tender and defiant. Individual freedom and social reform were dear to him. He fought tyranny relentlessly.

**About the poem** Prison Evening' is a touching lyric meditation by a lover. What gives strength and hope to this lover is his capacity for reading nature-the stars, the moon, the trees, the dark-green shadows-each telling him something that fits a pattern or forms a familiar shape in his mind. Art, or the imagination that occasions art, is a good companion in one's moments of loneliness or despair.

Mark how the lonely prisoner finds appropriate meanings,for what he perceives; how each object in nature seems to act or behave in a manner which the observer understands:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| the *star* | - | a rung/stop in the staircase |
| *the evening* | - | a spiral staircase |
| *the breeze* | - | whispering as it goes by |

*the trees* - absorbed in embroidering maps-refugees
busy learning the mutes of their future return
*the shadows* - seeming to come towards the prisoner

The separation, surely, is hard to bear. But the evening speculations involving nature's effects are consoling. No tyrant can imprison a poet or his imagination. Lovers might be kept from each other, but their love/imagination knows no separation or confinement.

By evening's devious stars
Rung by rung night is coming down;
A breeze passes close by,
As if someone has spoken a word of love;
In the prison yard trees, with no native land,
Head drooping, are absorbed in making
On the skirt of heaven images and pictures;
On the crest of the roof is glittering
The beautiful hand of the gracious moonlight;

The sheen of the stars has dissolved into the dust,
The blue of the sky has dissolved into light,
In green corners dark-blue shadows
Waver, as if into the heart
A ripple of pain for separation from the loved one were coming.

A thought continually says to my heart:
Life is so sweet this moment,
The mixers of tyranny's poison
Will not be able to be successful today nor tomorrow.
The lamps of the bridal-chamber of union,
Even if they have put them out, what then?
Were they to extinguish the moon, then we should acknowledge them.

*Translated from Urdu by V. G. Kiernan*

Compare the poem above with the following, another translation, more tending towards prose, of the same poem:

**Each star a rung, night comes down the spiral staircase
of the evening. The breeze passes by so very close as if
someone just happened to speak of love. In the
courtyard, the trees are absorbed refugees embroidering
maps of return on the sky, On the roof, the moon-
lovingly, generously is furning the stars into a dust
of sheen. From every corner, dark-green shadows, in
ripples, come towards me. At any moment they may break
over me, like the waves of pain each time I
remember this separation from my lover. This thought
keeps consoling me though tyrants may command that
lamps be smashed in rooms where lovers are destined to
meet, they cannot snuff out the moon, so today, nor
tomorrow, no tyranny will succeed, no poison of torture
make me bitter, if just one evening in prison can be so
strangely sweet, if just one moment anywhere on this
earth.**

## Glossary

Strangely sweet — *the poet's realization that this experience in prison one evening cannot be equalled elsewhere. It is 'strangely sweet' because only the poet knows what it is to miss his lady love and yet realize that no tyrant can effectiveiy destroy their love for each other.*

## Questions for Discussion

1. **Consider how Faiz Ahmad Faiz's 'A Prison Evening' is a lyric rage against tvranny.**

2. **Explain Faiz's 'strangely sweet' experience of 'A Prison Evening'.**

# Part Two
# Section B: Short Fiction

UNIT EIGHT

# The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World

## A Tale for Children

## Gabriel Garcia Marquez

**About the author** Acclaimed worldwide as a brilliant story teller and a radical thinker, Gabriel Garcia Marquez (b. 1928) is arguably the most significant writer alive in South America today. Garcia Marquez changed the landscape of modern fiction by publishing his *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in 1967, a novel whose enormous range of themes and narrative forms continues to fascinate writers and readers of this century

Myth and current events, magic and science, history and politics, legends and everyday affairs interpenetrate in Garcia Marquez's writing. They seem to be woven from the same fabric so much so that readers often experience a delectable confusion of realms. Some critics call this phenomenon Garcia Marquez's' magic realism'. Few of his readers can, however, resist the temptation to it his fiction into the world of which it speaks, or that world into his fiction. Garcia Marquez was awarded the Nobel Prize, for Literature in 1982.

**About the story** 'El ahogado mas hermoso del mundo (the Handsomest Drowned Man in the World) is a good example. Marquez story that blends realistic details, with the feminist. A drowned man, washed up oh a beach one day; becomes the object of great curiosity and fascination for the children of a fishing village

How the men and women of the village make this stranger their own, and call him Esteban [Stephen] forms the core of this

fascinating narative. The village is never the same after this event. Not only will the natives change their ways of life but the way they maintain their houses, and streets. Esteban's memory galvanizes the community into a new life of hope and self-respect. Their solidarity is reflected in the name they give their place, 'Esteban's village'.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- A story tells us how a person, a happening, a sudden turn of events, or a new discovery affects the normal course of events in life: In 'The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World' the arrival of a corpse has a sudden, extraordinary effect on the life of a village. Routine life is disrupted. The villagers seem to forget their daily work and commitments. For everyone, from children to women and men, the 'arrival' of the dead man signals a sudden.change in routine. The dead man becomes everything for them-a new gift, an object of prized possession, something that compels attention and an altered perspective on their lives and community.

- The 'meaning' of this story is not different from the meaning the villagers find or discover in their own lives. Some help is required in order to make sense of our lives. The drowned man here is perhaps the 'help' the villagers needed and were looking for. How they make new sense of their lives as a community is the substance of this story. That is the 'meaning' they have been looking for, and have succeeded in finding for themselves.

- The disruption caused by the arrival of the drowned man must be understood as a challenge to knowledge, What do the villagers know until then? (Twenty-odd wooden houses; stone courtyards with no flowers; desert like cape; the calm sea; small cots and beds; narrow doors and windows; small, ill-fitting clothes; low ceiling; unsteady chairs, etc.) The villagers must now find for themselves the meaning of this disruption as well. Only then can they advance in knowledge, or move towards .. better life.

- The elaborate preparation for burying the dead is symbolic. In this process, the villagers learn many things about life and

death. As they bury the dead, they change their outlook on life.

- Men and women fantasize (imagine things they want to do or see; fancy that they are other than what they really are; wish that things happen the way they want them, etc.) while they prepare the drowned man for burial. While they fantasize, they are also living and acting in the real work of real things. Garcia Marquez wants us to remember that stories are not unreal things. Fiction cannot exist without real people doing real things. As readers we must remember this.

- One way to read 'The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World' is to read it as a story that shows us clearly the process of/in myth-making. Its style alternates between the comic and the exuberant. Myth cannot carry conviction unless some of it, or parts of it, can be believed. Garcia Marquez, in other words, gives reality to the fantasy of the villagers so that we can believe this story.

- Consider the name Esteban, the Spanish for Stephen. Remember that Stephen was the first Christian martyr. Acts 6 of the Bible tells his story in detail. He was a successful evangelist. Stephen, we are told, had the face of an angel; at the time of his death, Stephen, like Christ, said, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' Stephen was persecuted and killed by his enemies.

- There are a number of other heroes and adventurers the drowned man compares with. Some of those comparisons occur to the villagers themselves, although they are not learned or knowledgeable like the readers of Garcia Marquez's story Consider the following:

1. The dead offer 'gifts' to the living. The drowned man here appears to give beauty, hope, solidarity, self-respect etc. to the fisher folk.

2. The young god, a fisherman, dies. Was not Christ 'a fisher of men's souls'?

3. Other heroic figures/adventurers on the sea: Odysseus (cf. Tennyson's 'Ulysses'), Columbus, Sir Walter Raleigh, Robinson Crusoe, etc.

- "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World' has an intriguing subtitle, 'A Tale for Children'. Of course children

'discover' the drowned man but the adults take the body away in order, it would seem, to make their discoveries. A 'tale' is a story to be *told*. Children love tales, even when they grow up to learn a language and are able to read the stories for themselves. It is interesting to notice the special features of this story's telling. (Who tells the story? Is its narrator one of, the fisher folk? Is the narrator a man or a woman? Does he/she 'know' more about the drowned man, or about the fisher folk; does this knowledge contribute to our understanding of the story? How?) Other details of the story, again, might be interesting because children would find them interesting" the adults fussing over the drowned man, as children would. Curiosity and dread characterize the actions of the adults here as well (Do the adults 'play with' the man as the children did when they initially mistook him for a strange toy?) There is a mock-play of guessing and entertainnient in the women as they dress Esteban up for funeral. (cf. 'The women who had dressed him, who had combed his hair, had cut his nails, and shaved him were unable to hold back a shudder of pity when they had to resign themselves to his being dragged along the ground ... They could see him in life ... ') There is a certain kind of imagination we don't seem to forego even in our adult lives. Garcia Marquez's story certainly appeals to that child-like imagination as well.

The first children who saw the dark and slinky bulge approaching though the sea let themselves think it was an enemy ship. Then they saw it had no flags masts an they thought it was a whale. But when it was washed up on the beach, they removed the clumps of seaweed, the jellyfish tentacles, and the remains of fish and flotsam, and only then did they see that it was a drowned man.

They had beep playing with him all atternoon, burying him in the sand and digging him up again, when someone, chanced to see them and spread the alarm in the village. The men who carried him to the nearest house noticed that he weighed more than any dead man they had ever known, almost as much as a horse, and they said

to each other that maybe he'd been floating too long and the water had got into his bones. When they laid him on the floor they said he'd been taller than all other men because there was barely enough room for him in the house, but they thought that maybe the ability to keep on growing after death was part of the nature of certain drowned men. He had the smell of the sea about him and only his shape gave one to suppose that it was the corpse of a human being, because the skin was covered with a crust of mud and scales.

They did not even have to clean off his face to know that the dead man was a stranger. The village was made up of only twenty-odd wooden houses that had stone courtyards with no 'flowers and which were spread about on the end of a desert like cape. There was so little land that mothers always went about with the fear that the wind would carry off their children and the few dead that the years had caused among them had to be thrown off the cliffs. But the sea was calm and bountiful and all the men fit into seven boats. So when they found the drowned man they simply had to look at one another to see that they were all there.

That night they did not go out to work at sea. While the men went to find out if anyone was missing in neighboring villages, the women stayed behind to care for the drowned man. They took the mud off with grass swabs, they remoyed the underwater stones entangled in his hair, and they scraped the crust off with tools used for scaling fish. As they were doing that they noticed that the vegetation on him came from faraway occans and deep water, and that his clothes were in tatters, as if he had sailed through labyrinths of coral. They noticed too that he bore his death with pride, for he did not have the lonely look of ther drowned men who came out of the sea or that haggard, needy look of men who drowned in rivers. But only when they finished cleaning him off did they become aware of the kind of man he was and it left them breathless. Not only was he the tallest, strongest, most virile, and best built man they had ever seen, but even though they would looking at him there was no room for him in their imagination.

They could not find a bed in the village large enough to lay him on nor was there a table solid enough to use for his wake. The tallest

men's holiday pants would not fit him, not the fattest ones' Sunday shirts, nor the shoes of the one with the biggest feet. Fascinated by his huge size and his beauty the women then decided to make him: some pants from a large piece of sail and a shirt from some bridal brabant linen so that he could continue through the death with dignity. As they sewed, sitting in a circle and gazing at the corpse between stitches, it seemed to them that the wind had never been so steady nor the sea so restless as on that night and they supposed that the change had something to do with the dead man. They thought that if that magnfficent man had lived in the village, his house would have had the widest doors, the highest ceiling, and the strongest floor, his bedstead would have been made from a midship frame held together by iron bolts, and his wife would have been the happiest woman. They thought that he would have so much authority that he could have drawn fish out of the sea simply by calling their names and that he would have put so much work into his land that springs would have burst forth form among the rocks so that he would have been able to plant flowers on the cliffs. They secretly compared him to their own men, thinking that for all their lives theirs were incapable of doing what he could do in one night, and they ended up dismissing them deep in their hearts as the weakest, meanest and most useless creatures on tarth. They were wandering through that maze of fantasy when the oldest woman, who as the oldest had looked upon the drowned man with more compassion than passion, sighed:

'He has the face of someone called Esteban.'

It was true. Most of them had only to take another look at him to see that he could not have any other name. The more stubborn among them, who were the youngest, still lived for a few hours which the illusion that when they put his clothes on and he lay among the "flowers in patent leather shoes his name might be Lautaro. But it was vain illusion. There had not been enough canvas, the poorly cut and worse sewn pants were too tight, and the hidden strength of his heart popped the buttons on his shirt. After midnight the whistling of the wind dies down and the sea fell into its Wednesday drowsiness. The silence put an end to any last doubts: he was Esteban. The

women who had dressed him, who had combed his hair, had cut his nails and shaved him were unable to hold back a shudder of pity when they had to resign themselves to his being dragged along the ground . It was then that they understood how unhappy he must have been with that huge body since it bothered him even after death. They could see him in life, condemned to going through doors sideways, cracking his head on crossbeams, remaining; on his feet during visits, not knowing what to do with his soft, pink, sea lion hands while the lady of the house looked for her most resistant chair and begged him, frightened to death, sit here, Esteban, please, and he, leaning against the wall smiling, don't bother, ma'am, I'm fine where I am, his heels raw and his back roasted from having done the same thing so many times whenever he paid a visit, don't bother, ma am, I'm fine where I am, just to avoid the embarrassment of breaking up the chair, and never knowing perhaps that the ones who said don't go, Esteban, at least wait till the coffee's ready, were the ones who later on would whisper the big boob finally left, how nice, the handsome fool has gone. That was what the women were thinking beside the body a little before dawn.  Later, when they covered his face with a handkerchief so that the light, would not bother him, he looked so forever dead, so defenseless, so much like their men that the first furrows of tears opened in their hearts. It was one of the younger ones whe began the weeping. The others, coming to, went from sighs to wails, and the more they sobbed the more they felt like weeping, because the drowned man was becoming all the more Esteba for them, and so they wept so much, for he was the most desutute, most peaceful, and most obliging man on earth, poor Esteban. So when the men returned with the news that the drowned man was not from the neighboring villages either, the women felt an opening of jubilation in the midst of their tears.

'Praise the Lord', they sighed, 'he's ours!'

The men thought the fuss was only womanish frivolity. Fatigued because of the difficult nighttime inquiries, all they wanted was to get rid of the bother of the newcomer once and for all before the sun grew strong on that arid, windlessday. They improvised a litter with the remains of foremasts and gaffs, tying it together with rigging

so that it would bear the weight of the body until they reached the cliffs. They wanted to tie the anchor from a cargo ship to him so that he would sink easily into the deepest waves, where fish are blind and divers die of nostalgia, and bad currents would not bring him back to shore, as had happened with other bodies. But the more they hurried, the more the women thought of ways to waste time. They walked about like startled hens, pecking with the sea charms on their breasts, some interfering on one side to put a scapular of the good wind on the drowned man, some on the other side to put a wrist compass on him, and after a great a great deal of *get away from there, woman, stay out of the way, look you almost made me fall on top of the dead man*, the men began to feel mistrust in their livers and started grumbling about why so many main a  r decorations for a stranger, because no matter how many nails and holy-water jars he had on him, the sharks wguld chew him all the same, but the women kept piling on their junk relics, running back and forth, stumbling, while they released in sighs what they did not in tears, so that the men finally exploded with *since when has there ever been such a fuss over a drifting corpse, a drowned nobody, a piece of cold Wednesday meat*. One of the women mortified by so much lack of care, then removed the handkerchief from the dead man's face and the men were left breathless too.

He was Esteban. It vas not necessary to repeat it for them to recognize him. If they had been told Sir Walter Raleigh, even they might have been impressed with his gringo accent, the macaw on his shoulder, his cannibal, killing blunderbuss, but there could be only one Esteban in the world and there he was, stretched out like a sperm whale, shoeless, wearing the pants of au undersized child, and with those stony nails that had to be cut with a knife. They only had to take the handkerchief off his face to see that he was ashamed, that it was not his fault that he was so big or so heavy or so handsome, and if he had known than this was going to happen, he would have looked for a more discreet place to drown in, seriously, I even would have tied the anchor off a galleon around my neck and staggured off a cliff like someone who doesn't like things in order not to be upsetting people now with this Wednesday dead body, as you people say, in order not to be bothering anyone with this filthy piece of cold

meat that doesn't have anything to do with me. There was so much truth in his manner thut even the most mistrustful men, the ones who felt the bitterness of endless nights at sea fearing that their women would tire of dreaming about them and begin to dream of drowned men, even they and others who were harder still shuddered in the marrow of their bones at Esteban's sincerity.

That was how they came to hold the most splendid funeral they could conceive of for an abandoned drowned man. Some women who had gone to get flowers in the neighboring villages returned with other women who could not believe what they had been told, and those women went back for more flowers when they saw the dead man, and they brought more and more until there were so many flowers and so many people that it was hard to walk about. At the final moment it pained them to return him to the waters as an orphan ard they chose a father and mother from among the best peuple, and aunts and uncles and cousins, so that through him all the inhabitants of the village became kinsmen. Some sailors who heard the weeping from a distance went off course and people heard of one who had himself tied to the mainmast, remembering ancient fables about sirens. While they fought for the privilege of carrying him on their shoulders along the steep escarpment by the cliffs, men and women became aware for the first time of the desolation of their streets, the dryness of their courtyards, the narrowness of their dreams as they faced the splendor and beauty of their drowned man. They let him go without an anchor so that he could come back if he wished and whenever he wished, and they all held their breath for the fraction of centuries the body took to fall into the abyss. They did not need to look at one another to realizing that they were no longer all present, that they would never be. But they also knew that everything would be different from then on, that their houses would have wider doors, higher ceilings, and stronger floors so that Esteban's memory could go everywhere without bumping into beams and so that no one in the future would dare whisper the big boob finally died, too bad, the handsome fool has finally died, because they were going to paint their house fronts gay colors to make Esteban's memory eternal and they were going to break their

backs digging for springs among the stones and planting flowers on the cliffs so that in future years at dawn the passengers on great liners would awaken, suffocated by the smell of gardens on the high seas, and the captain would have to come down from the bridge in his dress uniform, with his astrolabe, his pole star, and his row of war medals and, pointing to the promontoy of roses on the horizon, he would say in fourteen languages, look there, where the wind is so peaceful now that it's gone to sleep beneath the beds, over there, where the sun is so bright that the sunflowers don't know which way to turn, yes, over there, that's Esteban's village.

*Translated from Spanish by Gregory Rabassa*

## Questions for Discussion

1. **How did an ordinary fishing village come to acquire the romance of 'Esteban's village' in 'The Handsomest Drowned Man in the World'?**

2. **What discoveries do the children, women, and men make upon the arrival of the 'Drowned Man'? What symbolic suggestions does Garcia Marquez make towards this?**

3. **How do the fisher folk give Esteban a 'splendid funeral'? What does this gesture tell us about them?**

UNIT NINE

# Once Upon a Time

## Nadine Gordimer

**About the author** Nadine Gordimer (b. 1923) is a South African novelist, essayist and short story writer. Born of Jewish parents and inspired by progressive ideas in culture and politics, Gordimer has consistently opposed racism and had written and spoken against the apartheid policies of those in power in South Africa (1948-1994). Gordimer's work comprises ten volumes of short fiction and a dozen novels including her celebrated autobiographical novel called The Lying Days (1953). She won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

**About the story** 'Once Upon a Time' is best described as an 'anti-story' or a 'mock-story,' if such a term may be used to describe its peruliar generic status. For this is certainly not a textbook story complete with a cast of well-developed characters, a fictonal setting, a carefully marked 'complication' and a welcome 'resolution'-all executed along prescribed rulcs of the short story. As a matter of fact, the 'story' Gordimer teils herself (or plans to write?) is a simple, predictable one. That story answers to the specifications of a story we read in textbooks, a story of well-meaning but foolishly overcautious parents who are hoist by their own petard. The man and wife in this story propose to harm unwelcome trouble-makers but end up harming their only child

Gordimer's story---and the story embedded in it---demands careful reading along the following lines.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- First, the story begins by reflecting on *what* children's stories are. Are they stories in whicn children figure? Or those which are meant to entertain children? (Of course 'children's stories'

also mean those which children tell or write.) In any case a story for children is supposed to be simple and edifying. Such a story is supposed to carry a moral lesson. (But who learns a lesson in Gordimer's story?)

- 'Once Upon a Time' also tells us how it came to be planned or written. The narrator tells us in so many words the circumstances of its composition. On a sleepless night of anticipated burglary or robbery, the writer thinks up a story about security systems to ward off possible intruders.

- The narrator also seems to be inocking certain conver tions of what we generally call children's fiction. The title itself is the first example. 'Once Upon a Time' is not quite suitable for a story set in twentieth-century South Africa, which makes references to sophisticated alarm-systems and contemporary gadgets. The narrator's references, again, to people who 'lived happily ever after' are tongue-in-cheek. So are those reminders that her story also has its share of good children, lovable cats and dogs, sincere servants and ever-obliging neighbour.

- With such a promising setting and the presence of well-meaning people, we cannot easily understand how things go wrong. The ending of the story is very unpleasant, if disastrous. No burglar is harmed, no intruder caught in a fonl act. Sheer mischief lands a child in deep trouble. The alarms go, the device set up by 'The People for Total Safety' traps the dearest character, and with a seeming mock relish (or irony?), 'Once 'Upon a Time' ends tragically.

Someone has written to ask me to contribute to an anthology of stories for children. I reply that I dont write chidren's stories: and he writes back that at a recent congress, book fair/seminar a certain novelist said every writer ought to write at least one story for children. I think of sending a postcard saying I don't accept that I 'ought' to write anything.

And then last night I woke up-or rather was wakened without knowing what had roused me.

A vo'ce in the echo-chamber of the subconscious?
A sound.
A creaking of the kind made by the weight carried by one foot after another along a woodep floor. I listened. I felt the apertures of my ears distend with concentration. Again: the creaking I was waiting for it; waiting to hear if it indicated that feet were moving from room to room coming up the passage-to my door. I have no burglar bars no gun under the pillow, but I have the same fears as, people who do take these precautions, and my windowpanes are thin as time, could shatter like a wineglass. A woman was murdered (how do they put it) in broad daylight in a house two blocks away, last year, and the fierce dogs who guarded an old widower and his collection of antique clocks were strangled before he was knifed by a casual labourer hs had dismissed without pay.

I was staring at the door, making it out in my mind rather than seeing it, in the dark. I lay quite still-a victim already-but the arrhythmia of my heart was fleeing, knocking this way and that against its body-cage. How finely tuned the senses are, just out of rest, sleep! I could never listen intently as that in the distractions-of the day; I was reading every faintest sound, identifying and classifying its possible threat.

But I learned that I was to be neither threatened nor spared. There was no human weight pressing on the boards, the creaking was a buckling, an epicentre of stress. I was in it. The house that surrounds me while I sleep is built on undermined ground; far beneath my bed, the floor, the house's foundations, the stopes and passages of gold mines have hollowed the rock, and when some face trembles, detaches and falls, three thousand feet below, the whole house shifts slightly, bringing uneasy strain to the balance and counterbalance of brick, cement, wood and glass that hold it as a structure around me. The misbeats of my heart tailed off like the last muffled flourishes on one of the wooden xvlophones made by the Chopi and Tsonga nigrant miners who might have Been down there, under me in the earth at that moment. The stope where the fall was could have been disused, dripping water water from its ruptured weins; or men might now be interred there in the most profound of tombs.

I couldn't find a position in which my mind would let go of my body-release me to sleep again. So I began to tell myself a story; a bedtime story.

In a house, in a suburb, in a city, there were a man and his wife who loved each other very much and were living happily ever after. They had a little boy, and they loved him very much. They had a cat and a dog that the little boy loved very much. They had a car and a caravan trailer for holidays, and a swimming-pool which was fenced so that the little boy and his playmates would not fall in and drown. They had a housemaid who was absolutely trustworthy and an itinerant gardener who was highly recommended by the neighbours. For when they began to live happily ever after they were warned, by-that wise street. They were inscribed in a medical benefit society, their pet dog was licensed, they were insured against fire, flood damage and theft, and subscribed to the local Neighbourhood Watch, which supplied them with a plaque for their gates lettered YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED over the silhouette of a would-be intruder, He was masked; it could not be said if he was black or white, and therefore proved the property owner was no racist.

It was not possible to insure the house, the swimming pool or the car against riot damage. There were riots, but these were outside the city, where people of another colour were quatered. These people were not allowed into the suburt except as reliable housemaids and gardeners, so there was nothing to fear, the husband told the wife. Yet she, was afraid that some day such people might come up the street and tear off the plaque YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED and open the gates and stream in ... Nonsense, my dear, said the husband, there are police and soldiers and tear-gas and guns to keep them away. But to please her-for he loved her very much and buses were being burned, cars stoned, and schoolchildren shot by the police in those quarters out of sight and hearing of the suburb-he had electronically-controlled gates fitted. Anyone who pulled off the sign YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED, and trjed to open the gates would have to announce his intentions by pressing a button and speakin into a receiver relayed to the house. The little boy was fascinated by

the device and used it as a walkie-talkie in cops and robbers play with his small friends.

The riots were suppressed, but there were many burglaries in . the suburb and somebody's trusted.housemaid was tied up and shut in a cupboard by thieves while she was in charge of her employers' house, The trusted housemaid of the man and wife and little boy was so upset by this misfortune befalling a friend left, as she herself often was, with responsibility for the possessions of the man and his wife and the little boy that she impiored her employers to have burglar bars attached to the doors and windows of the house, and in alarm system installed. The wife said, She is right, let us take heed of her advice. So from every window and door in the house where they were living happily ever after they now saw the trees and sky through bars, and when the litrle boy's pet cat tried to climb in by the fanlight to keey him company in his little bed at night, as it customarily had done, it set off the alarm keening through the house.

The alarm was often answered -- it seemed-by other burglar alarms, in other houses, that had been triggered by pet cats or nibbling mice. The alarms called to one another across the gardens in shrills and bleats and wails that everyone soon became accustomed to, so that the din roused the inhabitants of the suburb no more than the croak of frogs and musical grating of cicadas' legs. Under cover of the electronic harpies' discourse intruders sawed the iron bars and broke into homes, taking sway hi-fi equipment, television sets, cassette players, cameras and radios, jewellery and clothing, and sometimes were hungry enough to devour everything in the refrigerator or paused audaciously to drink the whisky in the cabinets or patio bars. Insurance companies paid no compensation for single malt, a loss made keener by the property owner's knowledge thar the thieves wouldn't even have been able to appreciate what it was they were drinking.

Then the time came when many of the people who were no trusted housemaids and gardeners hung about the suburb because they were unemployed. Some importuned for a job: weeding or painting a roof; anything, *baus*, madam. Butthe man and his wife remembered the warning about taking on anyone off the street. Some drank liquor and fouled the street with discarded bottles. Some

begged, waiting for the man or his wife to drive the car out of the electronically-operated gates. They sat about with their feet in the gutters, under the jacaranda trees that made a green tunnel of the street-for it was a beautiful suburb, spoilt only by their presence-and sometimes they fell asleep lying right before the gates in the midday sun. The wife could never see anvone go hungry. She sem the trusted housemaid out with bread and tea, but the trusted housemaid said these were loafers and *tsotsis*, who would coine and tie her up and shut her in a cupbozrd. The husband said, She's right. Take heed of her advice. You only encourage them with your bread and tea. They are looking for their chance ... And he brought the little boy's tricycle from the garden into the house every night, because if-the house was surely secure, once locked and with the alarm set, someone might still be able to climb over the wall or the electronically closed gates into the garden.

You are right, said the wife, then the wall should be higher. And the wise old witch, the husband's mother, paid for the extra bricks as her Christmas present to her son and his wife-the Little boy got a Space Man outfit and a book of fairy tales.

But every week there were more reports of intrusion: in broad daylight and the dead of night, in the early hours oi the morning, Land even in the lovely summer twilight-a certain family was at dinner while the bediooms were being ransacked upstairs. The man and his wife, talking of the latest armed. robbery in the suburb, were distracted by the sight of the little boy's pet cat effortlessly arriving over the seven-foot wall, descending first with a rapid bracing of extended forepaws down on the sheer vertical surface, and then a graceful launch, landing with swishing tail within the property. The whitewashed wall was marked with the cat's comings and goings; and on the street side of the wall there were larger red-eaith smudges that could have been made by the kind of broken running shoes, seen on the feet of unemployed loiterers, that had no innocent destination.

When the man and wife and little boy took the pet dog for its walk round the neighbourhood streets they no longet paused to admire this show of roses or that perfect lawn; these were hidden

behind an array of different varieties of security fences, walls and devices. The man, wife, little boy and dog passed a remarkable choice: there was tie low-cost option of pieces of broken glass embedded in cement aiong the top of walls, there were iron grilles ending in lance-points, there were attefhpts at reconciling the aesthetics of prison architecture with the Spanish Villa style (spikes painted pink) and with the plaster urns of neoclassicel facades (cwelve-inch pikes finned like zigzags of lightning and painted pure white). Some walls had a small board affixed, giving the name and telephone number of the firm responsible for the installation of the devices. While the little boy and the pet dog raced ahead, the husband and wife found themselves comparing the possible effectiveness of each style against its appearance; and after several weeks when they paused before this barricade or that without needing to speak, both came out with the conclusion that only one was worth cousidering. It was the ugliest but the most'honest in its suggestion of the pure concentration-camp style, no frills, all evidlent efficacy. Placed the length of walls, it consisted of a continuous coil of stiff and shining metal serrated into jaggea blades, so that there would be no way of climbing over it and no way through its tunnel without getting entangled in its fangs. There would be no way out, only a struggle getting bloodier and sloodier, a ceeper and sha per hooking and tearing of flesh. The wife shuddered to look at it. You're right, said the husband, anyone would think twice ... And they took heed of the advice on s small board fixed, to the wall: Consult DRAGON'S TEETH The People For Total Security.

Next day a gang of workmen came and stretched the razor-bladed coils all round the walls of the house where the husband and wife and little boy and pet dog and cat were living happily ever after. The sunlight flashed and slashed, off the serrations, the comice of razor thorns encirled the home, shining. The husband said, Never mind. It will weather. The wife said, You're wrong. They guarantee it's rust-proof. And she waited until the little boy had run off to play before she said, I hope the cat will take heed ... The husband said, Don't worry, my dear, cats always look before they leap. And it was true that from that day on the cat slept in the little boy's bed and kept to the garden, never risking a try at breaching security.

One evening, the mother read the little boy to sleep with a fairy story from the book the wise old witch had given him at Christmas. Next day he pretended to be the Prince who braves the terrible thicket of thorns to enter the palace and kiss the Sleeping Beauty back to life: he dragged a ladder to the wall, the shining coiled tunnel was just wide enough for his little body to sreep in, and with the first fixing of its razes teeth in his knees and hands and head he screamed and struggled deeper into its tangle. The trusted housemaid and the itinerant gardener, whose 'day' it was, came running, the first to see and to scream with him, and the itlnerant gardener tore his hands trying to get at the little boy. Then the man and his wife burst wildly into the garden and for some reason, (the cat, probably) the alarm set up wailing against the screams while the bleeding mass of the little boy was hacked out of the security coil with saws, wire-cutters, choppers, and they carried it -- the man, the wife, the hysterical tru :ted housemaid and the weeping gardener-into the house.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What circumstances lead Gordimer to tell herself a story? Why does she call it a bedtime story ?

2. How does Gordimer subvert the conventions of the usual children's fiction in 'Once Upon a Time'?

UNIT TEN

# Miss Brill

## Katherine Mansfield

**About the author** Katherine Mansfield (1888-1923) was born in Wellington, New Zealand. For education and adventure. she prcferred life in London, where she met a number of writers and artists including Middleton Murry whom she married in 1918. She died young, at the age of 35. Her stories and sketches of suburban life are an amazing record of her artistry and sensitive view of life, people, and everyday events. As H. E. Bates, another distinguished writer of her generation, commented, 'She delights in making her characters show their thoughts by a kind of mental soliloquy, fluttering, gossipy, breathless with question and answer.'

**About the story** 'Miss Brill' is the story of an old woman told brilliantly and realistically, balancing thoughts and emotions that susiain her late solitary life amidst all the bustle of modern life. Miss Brill is a regular visitor on Sundays to the Jardins Publiques (the Public Gardens) of a small French suburb where she sits and watches all sorts of people come and go. She listens to the band playing, loves to watch people and guess what keeps them going and enjoys contemplating the world as a great stage upon which actors perform. She finds herself to be another actor among the so many she sees, or at least herself as 'part of the performance after all'.

One Sunday Miss Brill puts on her fur and goes to the Public Gardens as usual. The evening ends with her sudden realization that she is old and lonely, a realization brought to her by a conversation she overhears between a boy apd a girl presumably lovers, who comment on her unwelcome presence in their vicinity. Miss Brill is sad and depressed as she returns home, not stopping by as usual to buy her Sunday delicacy, a slice of honey-cake. She

retires to her dark room, puts the ur back into the box and imagines that she has heard something cry.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- Mansfield's 'Miss Brill' is preeminently a study of character, a sketch in prose that allows us to see clearly a person from many angles. We 'see' Miss Brill when she talks. She is, however, not presented as talking to someone in particular but as talking to herself, another way of representing what she thinks, how she reacts, and contemplates as things go on around her.

- She is herself a keen observer of , abjects, people, and events. As readers we observe her. What does this tell you about Mansfield's method of telling Miss Brill's story?

- 'Miss Brill' makes us think of life in its tragic and stoic dimensions. No great tragedy (the loss of a dear person; a fight between two friends; a grievous loss of money or personal property etc.) strikes Miss Brill, but we sense the terror of lonely old age and stoic suffering nevertheless.

- Consider Miss Brill's fascination for other people's lives, of both the old and the young. She wonders *what* keeps them going: company? love for gossip and fun? attachment to things or persons? Miss Brill, we are told, is inter ested in conversation: 'She had become really quite expert … at listening as though she didn't listen, at *sitting in other people's lives just for a minute* while they talked around her.' (What does this phrase really mean? Was she really interested in other lives?)

- The one elaborate metaphor Miss Brill develops for her Sunday experience in the Public Gardens is quite significant. She sees the world as a stage. Everyone here is a performer to whom is assigned a role with specific instructions, as it were, for entrance and exit.

- 'She was part of the performance after all.' (Does this line of thinking help Miss Brill understand the young couple who comment on her?)

Although it was so brilliantly fine-the blue sky powdered with gold and grent spots of light like white wine splashed over the Jardins Publiques-Miss Brill was glad that she had decided on her fur. The air was motionless, but when you opened your mouth there was just a faint chill, like a chill f:om à glass of iced water before you sip, and now and again a leaf came drifting-from nowhere, from the sky. Miss Brill put up her hand and touched her fur. Dear little thing! It was nice to feel it again. She had taken it out of its box that afternoon shaken out the moth-powder, given it a good brush, and rubbed the life back into.the dim little eyes. 'What has been happening to me?' said the sad little eyes. Oh, how sweet it was to see themn snap at her again from the red eiderdown! ... But the nose, which was of some black composition wasn't at all firm. It must have had a knock, somehow. Never mind a Iittle dab of black sealing-wax when the time came-when it was absolutely necessary ... Little roguel Yes she really felt like that abeut it. Litdle rogue biting its mail just by her left ear. She could have talent it off and laid it on her lap and stroked it. She felt a tingling in her hands and arms, but that came: from walking, she supposed-Ana when she breathed, something light and sad -- no, not sad, exactly -. something gentle seemed to move in her bosom.

There were a number of people out this afternoon, for more than last Sunday. And the band sounded louder and gayer. That was because the Season had begun. For although the band played all the year round on Sundays out of season it was never the same. It was like some one playing with only the family to listen, it didn't care how it played if there weren't any strangers present. Wasn't the conductor wearing a new coat, too? She was sure it was new ... He scraped with his foot and flapped his arms like a rooster about to crow, and the bandsmen sitting in the green rotunda blew out their cheeks and glared at the music. Now there came a little 'flutey' bit-very pretty!-a little chain of bright drops. She was sure it would be repeated. It was; she lifted her head and smiled.

Only two people shared her 'special' seat: a fine old man in a velvet coat, his hands casped over a huge carved walking-stick, and a big old woman, sitting upright, with a roll knitting on her

embroidered apron. They did not speak. This was disappointing, for Miss Brill always looked forward to the conversation. She had become really quite expert, she thought, at listening as though she didn't listen, at sitting in other people's lives just for a minute while they ralked around her.

She glanced, sideways, at the old couple. Perhaps they would go soon. Last Sunday, too, hadn't been as interesting. as usual an Englishman and his wife, he wearing a dreadful Panama hat and she button boots. And she'd gone on the whole time about how she ought to wear spectacles, she knew she needed rhem; but that it was no good getting any; they'd be sure to break and they'd never keep on. And he'd been so patient. He'd suggested everything - gold rims, the kind that curved rourd your ears, little pads inside the bridge. No, nothing would please her. 'They'll always be sliding down my nose!' Miss Brill had wanted to shake her.

The old people sat on the bench, still as statues. Never mind, there was always the crowd to watch. To an fro, in front of the flower beds and the band rotunda, the couples and groups paraded, stopped to talk, to greet, to but a handful of flowers from the old beggar who had his tray fixed to the railing. Little children ran among them, swooping and laughing, little boys with bag white silk bows under their chins, little girls, little French dolls, dressed up in velvet and lace. And sometimes a tiny staggerer came suddenly rocking Linto the open from under the trees, sropped, stared, as suddenly sat down 'flop' uhtil its small high-stepping mother, like a young hen, rushed scolding to its rescue. Other people sat on the benches and green chairs, but they'were, nearly always the same, Surday after Sunday and-Miss Brill had often noticed - there was something funny about nearly all of them. They' were odd, silent, nearly all old and from the way they stared they looked as though they'd just come from dark little rooms or even -- cupbcards!

Behind the rotunda the slender trees with yellow leaves down drooping and through them just a line of sea, and beyond the blue sky with gold veined clouds.

Tum-tum-tum tiddle-uml tiddle-um tum tiddley-um tum tat blew the band.

'Two young girls in red came by and two young soldiers in blue met them, and they laughed and paired and went off arm-in-arm. Two peasant women with funny straw hats passed, gravely, leading beautiful smoke colored dnkeys A cold, pale nun hurried by. A beautiful woman came along and dropped her bunch of violets, and a little boy ran after to hand them to her, and.she took them and threw them awav as if they'd been poisoned. Dear me! Miss Brill didn't know whether to admire that or not! And now an ermine toque and a gentleman in grey met just in from of her. He was tall, stiff, dignified, and she was wearing the ermine toque she'd brought when her hair was yelluw. Now everything;, her hair, her face, even her vyes, was the same color as the shabby ermine, and her hand, in its cleaned glove, lifted to dab her lips, was a riny yellowish paw. (h, she was so pleased to see him-delighted! She rather thought they were going to meet that afternoon. She described where she'd been -everywhere, here, there, alone by the sen. The day was so charming -didn't he agree? And wouldn't he, perhaps? ... But he shook his head, lighted a cigarette, slowly breathed a great deep puff into her face, and even, while : he was still talking and laughing, flicked the match away and walked on. The ermine toque was alone; she smiled more brighdy than ever. But even the band seemed to know what she was fecling and played more sofrly, played tenderiy, and the drum beat The Brutel The Brutel Over and over. What would she do? What was gong to happen now? But as Miss Brill wondered, the ermine toque turned, raised her hand as though she'd seen some one else, much nicer, just over there, and pattered away. And the bend changed again and played more quickly, more gaily than ever, and the old couple on Miss Brill's seat got up and marched away, and such a funny old man with long whiskers hobbled along in time to the music and was nearly knocked over by four girls walking abreast.

Oh, how fascinating it was! How she enjoyed it! How she loved sitting here, watching it all! It was like a play. It was exactly like a play. Who could believe the sky at the back wasn't painted? Bur it wasn't till a little brown dog trotred on solemn and then slowly trotted off, like a little 'theatre"dog, a fittle dong that had been

drugged, that Miss Brill discovered what it was that made it so exciting. They were all on the stage. They weren't only the audience, not only looking on; they were acting. Even she had a part and came every Sunday. No doubt somebody would have noticed if she hadn't been there; she was part of the performance after all. How strange she'd never thought of it like that before! And yet it explained why she made such a point of starting from home at just the same time each week - so as not to be late for the performance - and it also explained why she had quite a queer, shy feeling at telling her English pupils how she spent her Sunday afternoons. No wonder! Miss Brill nearly laughed out loud. She was on the stage. She thought of the old invalid gentleman to whom she read the newspaper four afternoons a week while he slept in the garden. She had got quite used to the frail head on the cotton pillow, the hollowed eyes, the open mouth and the high pinched nose. If he'd been dead she mightn't have noticed for weeks; she wouldn't have minded. But suddenly he knew he was having the paper read to him by an actress! "An actress!" The old head lifted; two points of light quivered in the old eyes. "An actress - are ye?" And Miss Brill smoothed the newspaper as though it were the manuscript of her part and said gently; "Yes, I have been an actress for a long time."

He band had been having a rest. Now they started again. And what they played was warm, sunny, yet there was just a faint chill - a something, what was it? - not sadness - no, not sadness - a something that made you want to sing. The tune lifted, lifted, the light shone; and it seemed to Miss Brill that in another moment all of them, all the whole company, would begin singing. The young ones, the laughing ones who were moving together, they would begin, and the men's voices, very resolute and brave, would join them. And then she too, she too, and the others on the benches - they would come in with a kind of accompaniment - something low, that scarcely rose or fell, something so beautiful - moving ... And Miss Brill's eyes filled with tears and she looked smiling at all the other members of the company. Yes, we understand, we understand, she thought - though what they understood she didn't know.

Just at that moment a boy and girl came and sat down where the old couple had been. They were beautifully dressed; they were

in love. The hero and heroine, of course, just arrived from his father's yacht. And still soundlessly singing, still with that trembling smile, Miss Brill prepared to listen.

"No, not now," said the girl. "Not here, I can't."

"But why? Because of that stupid old thing at the end there?" asked the boy. "Why does she come here at all - who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home?"

"It's her fu-fur which is so funny," giggled the girl. "It's exactly like a fried whiting."

"Ah, be off with you!" said the boy in an angry whisper. Then: "Tell me, ma petite chere--"

"No, not here," said the girl. "Not yet."

On her way home she usually bought a slice of honey-cake at the baker's. It was her Sunday treat. Sometimes there was an almond in her slice, sometimes not. It made a great difference. If there was an almond it was like carrying home a tiny present - a surprise - something that might very well not have been there. She hurried on the almond Sundays and struck the match for the kettle in quite a dashing way.

But to-day she passed the baker's by, climbed the stairs, went into the little dark room - her room like a cupboard - and sat down on the red eiderdown. She sat there for a long time. The box that the fur came out of was on the bed. She unclasped the necklet quickly; quickly, without looking, laid it inside. But when she put the lid on she thought she heard something crying.

# UNIT ELEVEN

# And of Clay are We Created

## Isabel Allende

**About the author** Isabel Allende (b. 1942) of Chile is one of the most widely read Latin American writers of our time. She has focussed on the lives of women, especially those women who have sacrificed their personal comforts and opportunities for love. Love, in fact, is the inferming spirit in most of her work even as such work also seems to address questions of political power, history, and money in the lives of ordinarypeople. She is rightly commended for the strength and suppleness of her prose, characteristics not entirely absent from the translations available to us.

**About the story** 'And of Clay are We Created' is a very moving story of a huge natural disaster involving, chiefly, three people: Rolf Carlé, a TV reporter; Azucena, a thirteen-year-old girl trapped in a mudpit; and Rolf Carlé's woman-companion with whom he lives. The narrator of the story is the latter who sees part of the 'action' on TV and visualizes the terror and trauma of the other two characters.

Rolf Carlé is summoned by his company to Lover the disaster of a volcanic eruption in a South American town. The towns of the valley are suddenly flooded with large chunks of snow. Rolf Carlé, one of the first to reach the spot, is immediately drawn towards Azucena who stands neck-deep in clayey mud. Three days and two nights pass by, as Rolf Carlé. tries to engage the girl in "conversatien, looks after her, and regales her with stories, etc.

However, Rolf Carlé could only witness her slow, silent passing midst all the flurry o/ visitors, newsmen and relief workers.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- Isabel Allende seems to be alerting us to at least two senses of story here. (Cf. 'The story came to us in his calm voice.') What are these two senses?

'And of Clay are We Created' is clearly a tragic story echoing at least some of the following passages from the Bible:

> For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return (*Genesis*, 3.19); Yovr remembrances are like unto ashes, yovr bodies to bodies of clay (Job, 13.12);
>
> Behold I am according to thy wish in God's stead; I also am formed out of the clay (Job, 33.6);
>
> He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock and established my goings (*Psalms*, 40.2).

- Allende certainly is telling a story. It is fiction that remembers and retells a story of despair, hope, and anguish. *Story*, however, has of late another meaning-the 'news story'. For Roif Carlé and his woman-companion/narrator, Azucena's is part of a larger story to be broken as news to the TV watchers. And as this 'story' unfolds, we see how it is palpably more real end touching, and how it deeply transforms the lives of Rolf Carlé and his woman-companion

- This story has an unusual narrator. She knows Rolf Carlé intimately. She is also faniiliar with the professional aspects of TV reporting and news transmission. Her verbal account of the scene is occasionally fleshed up by references to the placing and alignment of cameras and other recording gadgets, the facilities available to the TV crew, select objects and human presences that are newsworthy etc. Of special interest to the reader is her comment on the media vultures that hover over the disaster spot in order to seize upon details that add to the 'human interest' of the 'story'.

(Cf.'[O]ther reporters ... had appropriated Azucena, bestowing on her the pathetic responsibility of embodying the horror of what had happened in that place.)

The narrator, however, is almost speaking from a different plane, as it were, when she reports on the memories of Rolf Carlé and his boyhood in Austria.

- The dismal fatalism of the title is hard to ignore. (Recall the earlier citations from the Bible.) The clod is destined to be clod, no matter what shape or form it might assume for a time. Wasted and wasteful human effort runs as a theme in this story. The Herculean effort of the reporting team in harnessing manual and mechanical labour on the spot of disaster is contrasted with Rolf Carlé's single-handed and heroic struggle to save the poor girl's life. Against a vast build-up of media crew and equipment ('spools of cable, tapes, film, videos, precision lenses, recorders, sound consoles, lights, reflecting screens, auxiliary motors, cartons of supplies, electricians, sound technicians, and c imeramen ... ') Rolf Carlé's pump is often asked for, and ignored. The pictures and sounds of disaster gain sharper footage, but the agony abides.

- The narrative tide really turns with the woman's account of Rolf Carlé's singing of old Austrian folk songs.ITwo.majo strands of this man's life (one of the past; and the other of the present become one, when he begins to relive his traumatic boyhood in the hopeless turmoil of a volcanic eruption. That; tragedy has no real time or place, that it could resurface any time anywhere is recognized in passing.

- There, beside the hellhole of mud, it was impossible for Rolf to flee from himself any longer, and:theien visceral terror he had lived as a boy suddenly invaded him. He reverted to the years when he was the age of Azucena, and younger, and, likes.c her, found himself trapped in a pit without escape,buried in life, his head barely above ground ..

Tragedy is not one, but many. All stories are tragic. Only the names change, now here, now there.

They discovered the girl's head protruding from the mud pit, eyes wide open, calling soundlessly. She had a First Communion name

Anzucena. Lily. In that vast cemetery where the odor of death was already attracting vultures from far away, and where the weeping of orphans and warls of the injured filled the air, the little girl obstinately clinging to life became the symbol of the tragedy. The television cameras transmitted so often the unbearable image of the head budding like a black squash from the clay that there was no one who did not recognize her and know her name. And every time we saw her on the screen, right behind her was Rolf Carlé, who had gone there on assignment, never suspecting that he would find a fragment of his past, lost thirty years before.

First a subterranean sob rocked the cotton fields, curling them like waves of foam. Geologists had set up their seismographs weeks before and knew that the mountain had awakened again. For some time they had predicted that the heat of the eruption could detach the eternal ice from the slopes of the volcano, but no one heeded their warnings; they sounded like the tales of frightened old women. The towns in the valley went about their daily life, deaf to the moaning of the earth, until that fateful Wednesday night in November when a prolongea roar announced the end of the world, and walls of snow broke loose, rolling in an avalanche of clay, stones, and water that descended on the villages and buried thern beneath unfathomable meters of telluric vomit. As soon as the survivors emerged from the paralysis' of that first awful terror, they could see that'houses, plazas, churches, white cotton plantations, dark coffee forests, cattle pastures-all had disappeared. Much later, after soldiers and volunteers had arrived co rescue the living and try to assess the magnitude of the cataclysm, it was calculated that bencath the mud lay more than twenty thousand human beings and ar indefinite number of animals putrefying in a viscous soup. Forests and rivers had also been swept away, and there was nothing to be seen but an immense desert of mire.

When the station called before dawn, Rolf Carlé and I were together. I crawled out of bed, dazed with sleep, and went to prepare coffee while he hurriedly dressed. He stuffed his gear in the green canvas backpack he always carried, and we said goodbye, as we had so many times before. I had no presentiments. I sat in the kitchen

sipping my coffee and planning the long hours without him, sure that he would be back the next day

He was one of the first to reach the scene, because while other reporters were fighting their way to the edges of that morass in jeeps, bicycles, or on foot, each getting there however he could, Rolf Carlé had the advantage of the television helicopter, which flew him over the avalanche. We watched on our screens the footage captured by his assistant's camera, in which he was up to his knees in muck, a microphone in his hand, in the midst of a bedlam of lost children, wounded survivors, corpses, and devastation. The story came to us in his calm voice. For years he had been a familiar figure in newscasts, reporting live at the scene of battles and catastrophes with awesome tenacity. Nothing could stop him, and I was always amazed at his equanimity in the face of danger and suffering; it seemed as if nothing could shake his fortitude or deter his curiosity. Fear seemed never to touch him, although he had confessed to me that he was not a courageous man, far from it. I believe that the lens of the camera had a strange effect on him; it was as if it transported him to a different time from which he could watch events without actually participating in them. When I knew him better, I came to realize that this fictive distance seemed to protect him from his own emotions.

Rolf Carlé was in on the story of Azucena from the beginning. He filmed the volunteers who discovered her, and the first persons who tried to reach her; his camera zoomed in on the girl, her dark face, her large desolate eyes, the plastered-down tangle of her hair. The mud was like quicksand around her, and anyone attempting to reach her was in danger of, sinking. They threw a rope to her that she made no effort to grasp until they shouted to her to catch it; then she pulled a hand from the mire and tried to move, but immecately sank a little deeper. Rolf threw down his knapsack and the rest of his' equipment and waded into the quagmire, commenting for his assistant's microphone that it was cold and that one coud begin to smell the stench of corpses.

What's your name?' he asked the girl, and she told him her flower name. 'Don't move, Azucena,' Rolf Carlé directed, and kept

talking to her, without a thought for what he was saying, just to distract her, while slowly he worked his way forward in mud up to his waist: The air around him seemed as murky as the mud.

It was impossible to reach her from the approach he was attempting, so he retreated and circled around where there seemed to be firmer footing. When finally he was close enough, he took the rope and tied it beneath her arms, so they could pull her out. He smiled at her with that smile that crinkles his eyes and makes him look like a little boy; he told her that everything was fine, that he was here with her now, that soon they would have her out. He signaled the others to pull, but as soon as the cord tensed, the girl screamed. They tried again, and her shoulders and arms appeared, but they could move her no farther; she was trapped. Someone suggested that her legs might be caught in the collapsed walls of her house, but she said it was not just rubble, that she was also held by the bodies of her brothers and sisters clinging to her legs.

"Don't worry, we'll get you out of here," Rolf promised. Despite the quality of the transmission, I could hear his voice break, and I loved him more than ever. Azucena looked at him, but said nothing.

During those first hours Rolf Carlé exhausted all the resources of his ingenuity to rescue her. He struggled with poles and ropes, but every tug was an intolerable torture for the imprisoned girl. It occurred to him to use one of the poles as a lever but got no result and had to abandon the idea. He talked a couple of soldiers into working with him for a while, but they had to leave because so many other victims were calling for help. The girl could not move, she barely could breathe, but she did not seem desperate, as if an ancestral resignation allowed her to accept her fate. The reporter, on the other hand, was determined to snatch her from death. Someone brought him a tire, which he placed beneath her arms like a life buoy, and then laid a plank near the hole to hold his weight and allow him to stay closer to her. As it was impossible to remove the rubble blindly, he tried once or twice to dive toward her feet, but emerged frustrated, covered with mud, and spitting gravel. He concluded that he would have to have a pump to drain the water, and radioed a request for one, but received in return a message that

there was no available transport and it could not be sent until the next morning.

"We can't wait that long! " Rolf Carlé shouted, but in the pandemonium no one stopped to commiserate. Many more hours would go by before he accepted that time had stagnated and reality had been irreparably distorted.

A military doctor came to examine the girl, and observed that her heart was functioning well and that if she did not get too cold she could survive the night.

"Hang on, Azucena, we'll have the pump tomorrow," Rolf Carlé tried to console her.

"Don't leave me alone," she begged.

"No, of course I won't leave you."

Someone brought him coffee, and he helped the girl drink it, sip by sip. The warm liquid revived her and she began telling him about her small life, about her family and her school, about how things were in that little bit of world before the volcano had erupted. She was thirteen, and she had never been outside her village.Rolf Carlé, buoyed by a premature optimism, was convinced that everything would end well: the pump would arrive, they would drain the water, move the rubble, and Azucena would be transported by helicopter to a hospital where she would recover rapidly and where he could visit her and bring her gifts. He thought, She's already too old for dolls, and I don't know what would please her; maybe a dress. I don't know much about women, he concluded, amused, reflecting that although he had known many women in his lifetime, none had taught him these details. To pass the hours he began to tell Azucena about his travels and adventures as a newshound, and when he exhausted his memory, he called upon imagination, inventing things he thought might entertain her. From time to time she dozed, but he kept talking in the darkness, to assure her that he was still there and to overcome the menace of uncertainty

That was a long night

Many miles away, I watched Rolf Carlé and the girl on a television screen. I could not bear the wait at home, so I went to National Television, where I often spent entire nights with Rolf editing programs.

There, I was near his world, and I could at least get a feeling of what he lived through during those three decisive days. I called all the important people in the city, senators, commanders of the armed forces, the North American ambassador, and the president of National Petroleum, begging them for a pump to remove the silt, but obtained only vague promises. I began to ask for urgent help on radio and television, to see if there wasn't someone who could help us. Between calls I would run to the newsroom to monitor the satellite transmissions that periodically brought new details of the catastrophe. While reporters selected scenes with most impact for the news report, I searched for footage that featured Azucena's mudpit. The screen reduced the disaster to a single plane and accentuated the tremendous distance that separated me from Rolf Carlé; nonetheless, I was there with him. The child's every suffering hurt me as it did him; I felt his frustration, his impotence. Faced with the impossibility of communicating with him, the fantastic idea came to me that if I tried, I could reach him by force of mind and in that way give him encouragement. I concentrated until I was dizzy — a frenzied and futile activity. At times I would be overcome with compassion and burst out crying; at other times, I was sodrained I felt as if I were staring through a telescope at the light of a star dead for a million years.

I watched that hell on the first morning broadcast, cadavers of people and animals awash in the current of new rivers formed overnight from the melted snow. Above the mud rose the tops of trees and the bell towers of a church where several people had taken refuge and were patiently awaiting rescue teams. Hundreds of soldiers and volunteers from the Civil Defense were clawing through rubble searching for survivors, while long rows of ragged specters awaited their turn for a cup of hot broth. Radio networks announced that their phones were jammed with calls from families offering shelter to orphaned children. Drinking water was in scarce supply, along with gasoline and food. Doctors, resigned to amputating arms and legs without anesthesia, pled that at least they be sent serum and painkillers and antibiotics; most of the roads, however, were impassable, and worse were the bureaucratic obstacles that stood in the way. To top it all, the clay contaminated by decomposing bodies threatened the living with an outbreak of epidemics.

Azucena was shivering inside the tire that held her above the surface. Immobility and tension had greatly weakened her, but she was conscious and could still be heard when a microphone was held out to her. Her tone was humble, as if apologizing for all the fuss.

Rolf Carlé had a growth of beard, and dark circles beneath his eyes; he looked near exhaustion. Even from that enormous distance I could sense the quality of his weariness, so different from the fatigue of other adventures. He had completely forgotten the camera; he could not look at the girl through a lens any longer. The pictures we were receiving were not his assistant's but those of other reporters who had appropriated Azucena, bestowing on her the pathetic responsibility of embodying the horror of what had happened in that place. With the first light Rolf tried again to dislodge the obstacles that held the girl in her tomb, but he had only his hands to work with; he did not dare use a tool for fear of injuring her He fed Azucena a cup of the cornmeal mush and bananas the Army was distributing, but she immediately vomited it up. A doctor stated that she had a fever, but added that there was little he could do: Antibiotics were being reserved for cases of gangrene. A priest also passed by and blessed her, hanging a medal of the Virgin around her neck. By evening a gentle, persistent drizzle began to fall.

"The sky is weeping," Azucena murmured, and she, too, began to cry.

"Don't be afraid," Rolf begged. "You have to keep your strength up and be calm. Everything will be fine. I'm with you, and I'll get you out somehow."

Reporters returned to photograph Azucena and ask her the same questions, which she no longer tried to answer. In the meanwhile, more television and movie teams arrived with spools of cable, tapes, film, videos, precision lenses, recorders, sound consoles, lights, reflecting screens, auxiliary motors, cartons of supplies, electricians, sound technicians, and cameramen: Azucena's face was beamed to millions of screens around the world. And all the while Rolf Carlé kept pleading for a pump. The improved technical facilities bore results, and National Television began receiving sharper pictures and clearer sound; the distance seemed suddenly compressed, and I had

the horrible sensation that Azucena and Rolf were by my side, separated from me by impenetrable glass. I was able to follow events hour by hour; I knew everything my love did to wrest the girl from her prison and help her endure her suffering; I overheard fragments of what they said to one another and could guess the rest; I was present when she taught Rolf to pray, and when he distracted her with the stories I had told him in a thousand and one nights beneath the white mosquito netting of our bed.

When darkness came on the second day, Rolf tried to sing Azucena to sleep with old Austrian folk songs he had learned from his mother, but she was far beyond sleep. They spent most of the night talking, each in a stupor of exhaustion and hunger, and shaking with cold. That night, imperceptibly, the unyielding floodgates that had contained Rolf Carlé's past for so many years began to open, and the torrent of all that had lain hidden in the deepest and most secret layers of memory poured out, leveling before it the obstacles that had blocked his consciousness for so long. He could not tell it all to Azucena; she perhaps did not know there was a world beyond the sea or time previous to her own; she was not capable of imagining Europe in the years of the war. So he could not tell her of defeat, nor of the afternoon the Russians had led them to the concentration camp to bury prisoners dead from starvation. Why should he describe to her how the naked bodies piled like a mountain of firewood resembled fragile china? How could he tell this dying child about ovens and gallows? Nor did he mention the night that he had seen his mother naked, shod in stiletto-heeled red boots, sobbing with humiliation. There was much he did not tell, but in those hours he relived for the first time all the things his mind had tried to erase. Azucena had surrendered her fear to him and so, without wishing it, had obliged Rolf to confront his own. There, beside that hellhole of mud, it was impossible for Rolf to flee from himself any longer, and the visceral terror he had lived as a boy suddenly invaded him. He reverted to the years when he was the age of Azucena, and younger, and, like her, found himself trapped in a pit without escape, buried in life, his head barely above ground; he saw before his eyes the boots and legs of his father, who had removed his belt and was

whipping it in the air with the never-forgotten hiss of a viper coiled to strike. Sorrow flooded through him, intact and precise, as if it had lain always in his mind, waiting. He was once again in the armoire where his father locked him to punish him for imagined misbehavior, there where for eternal hours he had crouched with his eyes closed, not to see the darkness, with his hands over his ears, to shut out the beating of his heart, trembling, huddled like a cornered animal. Wandering in the mist of his memories he found his sister Katharina, a sweet, retarded child who spent her life hiding, with the hope that her father would forget the disgrace of her having been born. With Katharina, Rolf crawled beneath the dining room table, and with her hid there under the long white tablecloth, two children forever embraced, alert to footsteps and voices. Katharina's scent melded with his own sweat, with aromas of cooking, garlic, soup, freshly baked bread, and the unexpected odor of putrescent clay. His sister's hand in his, her frightened breathing, her silk hair against his cheek, the candid gaze of her eyes. Katharina . . . Katharina materialized before him, floating on the air like a flag, clothed in the white table cloth, now a winding sheet, and at last he could weep for her death and for the guilt of having abandoned her. He understood then that all his exploits as a reporter, the feats that had won him such recognition and fame, were merely an attempt to keep his most ancient fears at bay, a stratagem for taking refuge behind a lens to test whether reality was more tolerable from that perspective. He took excessive risks as an exercise of courage, training by day to conquer the monsters that tormented him by night. But he had come face to face with the moment of truth; he could not continue to escape his past. He was Azucena; he was buried in the clayey mud; his terror was not the distant emotion of an almost forgotten childhood, it was a claw sunk in his throat. In the flush of his tears he saw his mother, dressed in black and clutching her imitation-crocodile pocketbook to her bosom, just as he had last seen her on the dock when she had come to put him on the boat to South America. She had not come to dry his tears, but to tell him to pick up a shovel: the war was over and now they must bury the dead.

"Don't cry. I don't hurt anymore. I'm fine," Azucena said when dawn came.

"I'm not crying for you," Rolf Carlé smiled. "I'm crying for myself. I hurt all over."

The third day in the valley of the cataclysm began with a pale light filtering through storm clouds. The President of the Republic visited the area in his tailored safari jacket to confirm that this was the worst catastrophe of the century; the country was in mourning; sister nations had offered aid; he had ordered a state of siege; the Armed Forces would be merciless, anyone caught stealing or committing other offenses would be shot on sight. He added that it was impossible to remove all the corpses or count the thousands who had disappeared; the entire valley would be declared holy ground, and bishops would come to celebrate a solemn mass for the souls of the victims. He went to the Army field tents to offer relief in the form of vague promises to crowds of the rescued, then to the improvised hospital to offer a word of encouragement to doctors and nurses worn down from so many hours of tribulations. Then he asked to be taken to see Azucena, the little girl the whole world had seen. He waved to her with a limp statesman's hand, and microphones recorded his emotional voice and paternal tone as he told her that her courage had served as an example to the nation. Rolf Carlé interrupted to ask for a pump, and the President assured him that he personally would attend to the matter. I caught a glimpse of Rolf for a few seconds kneeling beside the mudpit. On the evening news broadcast, he was still in the same position; and I, glued to the screen like a fortuneteller to her crystal ball, could tell that something fundamental had changed in him. I knew somehow that during the night his defenses had crumbled and he had given in to grief; finally he was vulnerable. The girl had touched a part of him that he himself had no access to, a part he had never shared with me. Rolf had wanted to console her, but it was Azucena who had given him consolation.

I recognized the precise moment at which Rolf gave up the fight and surrendered to the torture of watching the girl die.I was

with them, three days and two nights, spying on them from the other side of life. I was there when she told him that in all her thirteen years no boy had ever loved her and that it was a pity to leave this world without knowing love. Rolf assured her that he loved her more than he could ever love anyone, more than he loved his mother, more than his sister, more than all the women who had slept in his arms, more than he loved me, his life companion, who would have given anything to be trapped in that well in her place, who would have exchanged her life for Azucena's, and I watched as he leaned down to kiss her poor forehead, consumed by a sweet, sad emotion he could not name. I felt how in that instant both were saved from despair, how they were freed from the clay, how they rose above the vultures and helicopters, how together they flew above the vast swamp of corruption and laments. How, finally, they were able to accept death. Rolf Carlé prayed in silence that she would die quickly, because such pain cannot be borne.

By then I had obtained a pump and was in touch with a general who had agreed to ship it the next morning on a military cargo plane. But on the night of that third day, beneath the unblinking focus of quartz lamps and the lens of a hundred cameras, Azucena gave up, her eyes locked with those of the friend who had sustained her to the end. Rolf Carlé removed the life buoy, closed her eyelids, held her to his chest for a few moments, and then let her go. She sank slowly, a flower in the mud.

You are back with me, but you are not the same man. I often accompany you to the station and we watch the videos of Azucena again; you study them intently, looking for something you could have done to save her, something you did not think of in time. Or maybe you study them to see yourself as if in a mirror, naked. Your cameras lie forgotten in a closet; you do not write or sing; you sit long hours before the window, staring at the mountains. Beside you, I wait for you to complete the voyage into yourself, for the old wounds to heal. I know that when you return from your nightmares, we shall again walk hand in hand, as before.

*Translated from Spanish by Murgaret Sayers Peden*

## Questions for Discussion

1. **Human tragedy touches much deeper than one knows. How does 'And of Clay are We Created' persuade you to believe in the power of tragic narratives?**

2. **Does the phrase 'relief operations' sound hollow after reading Allende's' And of Clay are We Created? Why?**

3. **Comment on the strange power of the *narrative* of 'And of Clay are We Created'. How does the narrator balance our interest in the two disasters-of the volcanic eruption on the one hand, and of Rolf Carlé's hopeless struggle on the other?**

# Part Two

# Section C: Essay

UNIT TWELVE

# On the Abolition of the English Department

## Ngugi Wa Thiong'o

**About the author** Keryar Born James Ngugi in 1938, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o is East Africa's most celebrated and accomplished writer to date. Author or such celebrated novels as *The River Betwcen* (1965) and *Petals of Blood* (1977), Ngugi has also published collections of critical essays on cultural and political reactions to *British domination such as Homecoming* (1972), *Writers on Politics* (1981), *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), and *Penpoints, Gunpoints, and Dreams* (1998). Committed to humanist values, Ngugi considers the role of the writer as crucial in socio-political conflicts.

**About the essay** 'On the Abolition of the English Department is a polemical essay most misunderstood by those who have paid very little attention to Ngugi's strong plea for a nativist orientation (African, in his case) one's approach to English and other literatures of the world.

Ngugi poses here a fundamental question concerning our understanding of English, and its place in our historical consciousness. The Department of English at the University of Nairobi is quite right, in Ngugi's view, in re-considering 'the role and status of an English Department in an African situation and environment'. But the Department's assumption is that the English historical tradition has a longer and more significant claim to African attention than Africa's own history and tradition. In this assumption, 'Africa becomes an extension of the west,' and African subjects assume prominence only in the context of, or in relationship to, western history and cultural traditions.

If we assume that the history of a single tradition is to be studied in its continuity, argues Ngugi, the Africans ought to begin with *African* history and the evolution of its cultural forms rather than with the British. The question he asks is quite opposite to all postcolonial cultures that tend to view themselves as late appendages to dominant western stories. 'Why can't African literature be at the centre,' asks Ngugi, 'so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?'

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- Students and teachers of English in India ought to ask this question as well. (see Meenakshi Mukherjee's essay for similar views.) In asking this, we are only recognizing the historical fact that English came to us later than our languages, that we must see English in the context of *our* languages, cultures, religious and philosophical traditions rather than the other way round. The continuity of our traditions has in fact been ruptured by British imperialism and the introduction of English as a subject and the medium of instruction in our schools and colleges.

- In sum, Ngugi's point is simple and, today, well taken: our country and culture are paramount. We must view English from the centre of our continuities in history and traditions. Departments of English must realize this.

  It is wrong-headed to study our literatures in and through English, locating ourselves in Departments of English. We must study English, but we must study it from our locations of tradition and culture.

- Ngugi's essay can be better appreciated if we allow ourselves to understand the mindset of postcolonial societies.

  It has often been pointed out correctly, that it is the *cultural and psychological effects* of colonialism that matter most to students of English. What they need to understand is that opposition, struggle or resistance to colonialism has to be as strong in the cultural and psychological domains as they must be in the material or economic domains.

This is how Ngugi proposes what he calls 'the decolonization of the mind'

1. This is a comment on the paper presented by the Acting Head of the English Department at the University of Nairobi to the 42nd meeting of the Arts Faculty Board on the 20th September, 1968.

2. a) That paper was mainly concerned with possible developments within the Arts Faculty and their relationship with the English Department, particularly:
   i) The place of modern languages, especially French;
   ii) The place and role of the Department of English;
   iii) The emergence of a Department of Linguistics and Languages;
   iv) The place of African languages, especially Swahili.

   b) In connection with the above, the paper specifically suggested that a department of Linguistics and Languages, to be closely related to English, be established.

   c) A remote possibility of a Department of African literature, or alternatively, that of African literature and culture, was envisaged.

3. The paper raised important problems. It should have been the subject of a more involved debate and discussion, preceding the appointment of a committee with specific tasks, because it raises questions of value, direction and orientation.

4. For instance, the suggestions, as the paper itself admits, question the role and status of an English Department in an African situation and environment. To quote from his paper:

   The English Department has had a long history at this College and has built up a strong syllabus which by its study of the *historic continuity of a single culture throughout the period of emergence of the modern west*, makes it an important companion to History

and to Philosophy and Religious Studies. However, *it is bound to become less 'British', more open to other writing in English (American, Caribbean, African, Commonwealth) and also to continental writing, for comparative purposes.*

5. Underlying the suggestions is a basic assumption that the English tradition and the emergence of the modern west is the central root of our Consciousness and cultural heritage. Africa becomes an extension of the west, an attitude which, until a radical reassessment, used to dictate the teaching and organization of History in our University. Hence, in fact, the assumed centrality of the English Department, into which other cultures can be admitted from time to time, as fit subjects for study, or from which other satellite departments can spring as time and money allow. A small example is the current, rather apologetic attempt to smuggle African writing into an English syllabus in our three colleges.

6. Here then, is our main question: If there is need for a 'study of the historic continuity of a single culture', why can't this be African? Why can't African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?
This is not mere rhetoric: already African writing, with the sister connections in the Caribbean and the Afro-American literatures, has played an important role in the African renaissance, and will become even more and more important with time and pressure of events. Just because for reasons of political expediency we have kept English as our official language, there is no need to substitute a study of English culture for our own. We reject the primacy of English literature and culture.

7. The aim, in short, should be to orientate ourselves towards placing Kenya, East Africa, and then Africa in the centre. All other things are to be considered in their relevance to our situation, and their contribution towards understanding ourselves.

8. We therefore suggest:

   A. That the English Department be abolished;

B. That a Department of African Literature and Languages be set up in its place.

The primary duty of any literature department is to illuminate the spirit animating a people, to show how it meets new challenges, and to investigate possible areas of development and involvement.

In suggesting this name, we are not rejecting other cultural streams, especially the western stream. We are only clearly mapping out the directions and perspectives the study of culture and literature will inevitably take in an African university.

9. We know that European literatures constitute one source of influence on modern African literatures in English, French, and Portuguese; Swahili, Arabic, and Asian literatures constitute another, an important source, especially here in East Africa; and the African tradition, a tradition as active and alive as ever, constitutes the third and the most significant. This is the stuff on which we grew up, and it is the base from which we make our cultural take-off into the world.

10. Languages and linguistics should be studied in the department because in literature we see the principles of languages and linguistics in action. Conversely, through knowledge of languages and linguistics we can get more from literature. For linguistics not to become eccentric, it should be studied in the Department of African Literature and Languages.

    In addition to Swahili, French, and English, whenever feasible other languages such as Arabic, Hindustani, Kikuyu, Luo, Akamba, etc., should be introduced into the syllabus as optional subjects.

11. On the literature side, the Department ought to offer roughly:
    a) The oral tradition, which is our primary root;
    b) Swahili literature (with Arabic and Asian literatures): this is another root, especially in East Africa;
    c) A selected course in European literature: yet another root;
    d) Modern African literature.

> For the purposes of the Department, a knowledge of Swahili English, and French should be compulsory. The largest body of writing by Africans is now written in the French language. Africans writing in the French language have also produced most of the best poems and novels. In fact it makes nonsense to talk of modern African literature without French.

## The Oral Tradition

The Oral tradition is rich and many-sided. In fact 'Africa is littered with Oral Literature'. But the art did not end yesterday; it is a living tradition. Even now there are songs being sung in political rallies, in churches, in night clubs by guitarists, by accordion players, by dancers, etc. Another point to be observed is the interlinked nature of art forms in traditional practice. Verbal forms are not always distinct from dance, music, etc. For example, in music there is close correspondence between verbal and melodic tones; in 'metrical lyrics' it has been observed that poetic text is inseparable from tune; and the 'folk tale' often bears an 'operatic' form, with sung refrain as an integral part. The distinction between prose and poetry is absent or very fluid. Though tale, dance, song, myth, etc. can be performed for individual aesthetic enjoyment, they have other social purposes as well. Dance, for example, has been studied 'as symbolic expression of social reality reflecting and influencing the social, cultural and personality systems of which it is a part'. The oral tradition also comments on society because of its intimate relationship and involvement. The study of the oral tradition at the University should therefore lead to a multi-disciplinary outlook: Literature, Music, Linguistics, Sociology, Anthropology, History, Psychology, Religion, Philosophy. Secondly, I study can lead to fresh approaches by making it possible for the student to be familiar with art forms different in kind and historical development from Western literary forms. Spontaneity and liberty of communication inherent in oral transmission — openness to sounds, sights, rhythms, tones in life and in the environment — are examples of traditional elements from which the student can draw. More specifically, his familiarity with oral literature could suggest new structures and techniques; and could foster attitudes of mind

characterized by the willingness to experiment with new forms, so transcending 'fixed literary patterns' and what that implies — the preconceived ranking of art forms.

The study of the Oral Tradition would therefore supplement (not replace) courses in Modern African Literature. By discovering and proclaiming loyalty to indigenous values, the new literature would on the one hand be set in the stream of history to which it belongs and so be better appreciated; and on the other be better able to embrace and assimilate other thoughts without losing its roots....

## Conclusion

One of the things which has been hindering a radical outlook in our study of literature in Africa is the question of literary excellence; that only works of undisputed literary excellence should be offered. (In this case it meant virtually the study of disputable 'peaks' of English literature.) The question of literary excellence implies a value judgement as to what is literary and what is excellence, and from whose point of view. For any group it is better to study representative works which mirror their society rather than to study a few isolated 'classics', either of their own or of a foreign culture.

To sum up, we have been trying all along to place values where they belong. We have argued the case for the abolition of the present Department Of English in the College, and the establishment of a Department of African Literature and Languages. This is not a change of names only. We want to establish the centrality of Africa in the department. This, we have argued, is justifiable on various grounds, the most important one being that education is a means of knowledge about ourselves. Therefore, after we have examined ourselves, we radiate outwards and discover peoples and worlds around us. With Africa at the centre of things, not existing as an appendix or a satellite of other countries and literatures, things must be seen from the African perspective. The dominant object in that perspective is African literature, the major branch of African culture. Its roots go back to past African literatures, European literatures, and Asian literatures. These can only be studied meaningfully in a Department of African Literature and Languages in an African University.

We ask that this paper be accepted in principle; we suggest that a representative committee be appointed to work out the details and harmonize the various suggestions into an administratively workable whole.

James Ngugi
Henry Owuor-Anyumba
Taban Lo Liyong
24th October 1968

## Questions for Discussion

1. How does Ngugi's 'On the Abolition of the Englich Department' help you reorient yourself as a student of English? Illustrate with refererce to at least two texts of your choice.

2. 'We have been trying all along to place values where they belong,' remarks Ngugi in his conclusion to 'On the Abolition of the English Department'. What'values' does he uphold?

UNIT THIRTEEN

# Minute on Indian Education

## Thomas B. Macaulay

**About the author** Thomas B. Macaulay (1800 -- 1859), English historian, politician, poet and essayist came to India as a law member of the East India Company's governing board in 1834. During his four-year stay in India he wrote the 'Minute on Indian Education' in February 1835. The 'Minute' virtually decided the future of Indian education. Macaulay was also responsible for drafting the Indian Penal Code. Thus, Macaulay's role was crucial in determining the future of two major domains of Indian public life, namely, education and civic law.

**About the essay** 'The 'Minute' of 1835 was written in the context of an ongoing debate between the Orientalists (those who pleaded for Indian education in the classical languages of Persian and Sanskrit) and the Anglicists (those who believed that English has no equal among Indian or other languages for the purpose of public instruction).

Of course the 'Minute's' vote for English and the Anglicist stance was unambiguous. It should be borne in mind, however, that Macaulay was not recommending that English must replace Sanskrit at higher levels of education. What he recommended was that the East India Company should in no away subsidize education in Sanskrit or Persian. The subsidy should augment and promote education in India in English.

## Hints for Critical Discussion

- Macaulay's claims for the solitary distinction of English as the medium of public instruction

- The advantages of English as the vehicle of modern knowledge and subjects of European origin

- The civilizing potential of the conqueror's language. The great value of "literature of England" as Macaulay sees it.

- The Russian example---how Russia 'educated' itself by learning the languages of Western Europe

- Macaulay's proposa! to selectively train and educate a 'class of Indians as 'fit vehicles' for conveying knowledge.

- Although, many of Macaulay's assumptions and views on such things as language, the culture it embodies; the production of knowledge, the politics of donunance, etc. can easily be-faulted, it is interesting that many Indians today, both of the' ideological left and right, are heard echoing some of these assumptions, or rephasing them 'correctly' from time to time when they are confronted with the question of English in our country. Examine each of these ideas in your discussion.

- At the very least, shall we decide to keep English by refuting the 'Minute,' or consider the 'Minute' as long past refutation? Students and teachers of English are yet to decide this without taking recourse to prevarication.

How, then, stands the case? We have to educate ? people who cannot at present be educated by means of their mother-tongue. We must! teach them some foreign language. The claims of our own language it is hardly necessary to recapitulate. I stands pre-eminent even among the languages of the west. It abound with works of imagination not inferior to the noblest which Greece has bequeathed to us; with models of every species of eloquence; with historical compositions, which, considered merely as narratives, have seldom been surpassed, and which, considered as vehicles of ethical and political instruction, have never been equalled; with just and lively representations of human life and human nature; with the most propound speculations on metaphysics, morals, government, jurisprudence, and trade; with full and correct information respecting every experimental science which tends to preserve the health, to increase the comfort, or to

expand the intellect of man. Whoever knows that language has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may safely be said, that the literature now extant in that language is of fat greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the weird 'together. Nor is this all. In India, English is the language spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher mass of natives at the seats of Government. 'It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language two great European communities which are rising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia; communities which are every year becoming more important, and more closely connected with our Indian Empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be the most useful to our native subjects.

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own, whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, wherever they differ from those Of Europe differ for the Worse, and Whether, when we Can patronize sound philosophy and true history, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines which would disgrace an English farrier, astronomy which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, history abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long, and geography made of seas of treacle and seas of butter.

We are not without experience to guide us. History furnishes several analogous cases, and they all teach the same lesson. There are, in modern times, to go no further, two memorable instances of a great impulse givento the mind of a whole society, of prejudices overthrown, of knowledge diffused, of taste purified, of arts and sciences planted in countries which had recently been ignorant and barbarous.

The first instance to which I refer is the great revival of letters among the Western nations at the close of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century. At that time almost everything that was worth reading contained in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans. Had our ancestors acted as the Committee Of Public Instruction has hitherto noted, had they neglected the language of Cicero and Tacitus, had they confined their attention to the Old dialects of our own island, had they printed nothing and taught nothing at the universities but chronicles in Anglo-Saxon and romances in Norman French,-would England ever have been what she now is? What the Greek and Latin were to the contemporaries of More and Ascham, our tongue is to the people of India. The literature of England is now more valuable than that of classical antiquity. I doubt whether the Sanscrit literature be as valuable as that of our Saxon and Norman progenitors. In some departments-in history for example-I am certain that it is much less so.

Another instance may be said to be still before our eyes. Within the last hundred and twenty years, a nation which had previously been in a state as barbarous as that in which our ancestors were before the Crusades has gradually emerged from the ignorance in which it was sunk, and has taken its place among civilized communities.

I speak osf Russia. There is now in that country a large educated class abounding with persons fit to serve the State in the highest functions, and in nowise inferior to the most accomplished men who adorn the best circles of Paris and London. There is reason to hope that this vast empire which, in the time of our grandfathers, was probably behind the Punjab, may in the time of our grandchildren, be pressing close on France and Britain in the career of improvement. And how was this change effected? Not by flattering national prejudices; not by feeding the mind of the young Muscovite with the old women's stories which his rude fathers had believed; not by filling his head with lying legends about St. Nicholas; not by encouraging him to study the great question, whether the world was or not created on the 13th of September; not by calling him "a learned native" when he had mastered all these points of knowledge; but by teaching him those foreign languages in which the greatest

mass of information ha been laid up, an thus putting all that information within his reach. The languages of western Europe civilised Russia. I cannot doubt that they will do for the Hindoo what they have done for the Tartar.

Questions for Discussion

1. Do you think Macaulay's remarks on Indian culture to be deplorable? Explain.

2. How does Macaulay propose to construct an efficient interface between India and the British administration by introducing English education?

3. Consider Macaulay's statement on 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions …. ' etc.

4. "Do you think this 'class' had indeed materialized in pre-independent India? Has this class grown considerably since independence? How has this'class' influenced the fortunes of India?".

UNIT FOURTEEN

# Interrogating Post-colonialism

## Meenakshi Mukherjee

**About the author** Meenakshi Mukherjee (b. 1937) w.as born in Calcutta and educated in Patna and the universities of Pennsylvania and Pune. She taught English and Comparative Literature in Pune, New York, Delhi and Hyderabad. Founder editor of *Vagartha*, a journal of Indian writing and translations in English of the 1970s, Mukherjee has initiated a large number of successful projects on the literatures of India, nation, nationalism, and gender in Indian writing.

**About the essay** '*Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text, and Context* (1996) is a collection which Mukherjee has co-edited with Harish Trivedi. The papers in this volume critically evaluate the institutionalization of post-colonial studies in the US and Europe. Mukherjee's essay here is introductory in scope and intent. She asks what the term 'post-colonial' in the context of literary studies means in our country, and how we shall see its enabling prospects. She wonders whether an indiscriminate recourse to western theories, of which post-coloniality/post-colonialism is one will necessarily yield the best results for our readers. She reminds us that our languages and cultures have either afforded us, or are in pursuit of, theoretical materials and methods of our own to study them. It might be prudent, therefore, to position ourselves outside the postcolonial matrix to see what literature means for us with no respect to the 'postcolonial'. In any case, it is advantageous to interrogate and seek answers for ourselves rather than readily adopt postcolonial paradigms and positiors that reach us from afar.

## Topics/Hints for Critical Discussion

- The need to understand the assumptions of post-colonialism. Consider why departments/students of English seem more directly concerned with post-colonialism. (How does it concern you directly?)

- Post-colonial voices. It is interesting to consider whether students of English hear only those voices in English. Have you heard post-colonial voices in Kannada, for example? Where?

- The emancipatory concept of post-colonialism -- are canons and classics peculiar to imperialist writing?

- It would be interesting to consider specific texts and authors, and in some cases historical phenomena reflected in literature, of the following:
    1. Identity, self, nation etc. and post-colonialism
    2. The 'risks' inherent in the formulation of post-coloniality.
    3. How post-colonialism might over-emphasize, some times occlude, issues.
    4. The double bind of post-colonialism and theory.

- Can any one in today's world legitimately claim that he/she has no interest in other parts of the world? How is this question valid in the discussion of post-coloniality?

- The advantage of dispensing with the 'Commonwealth' in Commonwealth literature. The terms of literary-critical discourse appear to have radically changed since then,

- The possible split within Departments and readers of English literature in India. Has post-colonialism divided our teachers and learners of English?

- How post-colonialism has opened up possibilities -- of advancement, recognition, careers across the world for indian teachers of English.

If a 'globalising spread of imperialism' the most significant of the late nineteenth century,' the end of the century may well be seen as an era of another 'globalising spread—this time of post-colonial theory, even though its reach remains confined only to the institutions of higher learning. Suddenly, in the last decade or universities all over the world, particularly the Departments of Literature, have begun to introduce courses that focus on this area. Post-colonial texts are being added to the curriculum, researchers are looking into the political and cultural implications of the post-colonial condition, some of the most exciting theorists are initiating debates about the relationship between post-coloniality and postmodernism—another key concept of our time. The long century of European political domination of the rest of the world being finally over, the time seems to have come to reckon with its civilizational aftermath, making it necessary to undertake a rigorous scrutiny of the continuities and ruptures in the decolonised societies.

Even though the term post-colonial has its origin in an academy that is not necessarily post-colonial like many other concepts of theoretical discourse from the West, this too has gained an unproblematic acceptance in our universities in India, perhaps even more readily than many other concepts because it is supposed to involve us directly. After having been accustomed for a long time to being actors without speaking parts in the world arena of English Studies, it is both flattering and exhilarating for us to be allowed a voice, and to suddenly find that the present moment in our narrow local existence is actually part of a broader historical process of global magnitude worthy of being theorised.

Post-colonialism is not merely a chronological label referring to the period after the demise of empires. It is ideologically an emancipatory concept particularly for the students of literature ouside the western world, because it makes us interrogate many aspects of the study of literature that we were made to take for granted, enabling us not only to read our own texts in our own terms, but also to re-interpret some of the old canonical texts from Europe from the perspective of our specific historical and geographical location. It brings severely into question the old idea of the autotelic nature of

literary text an the sealed and-septic notion of 'artistic' value uncontaminated by the political circumstances of its production and reception—forcing everyone involved in the discipline to rethink the limitations of the Eurocentric/ universalist aesthetic norms.

In less than half a century, there seems to have occurred a diametric shift in the academic practice of literary studies. Until the mid-twentieth century all critical discourse had to be produced from the imperial centre of power (l recall my own student days in the fifties when the best students were supposed to be those who had mastered the ventriloquist's art, and managed to adopt a British voice literally and metaphorically, wiping out all local traces). By the nineties radical theory had begun not only to take into consideration the dispossessed and the peripheral, but to privilege them over all others. In Homi Bhabha's words, "a range of contemporary critical theories suggest that it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking. There is even a growing conviction that the affective experience of social marginality... transforms our critical strategies. In this swing of the pendulum, marginality is valorised, oppression almost turns into empowerment. On the whole however post-colonialism foregrounds the need for recognising identities, voices and situations that were not granted by the colonial power, but are perceived and defined by us. No one will doubt the desirability of such an enterprise, so long as one can make sure that the terms of discourse are indeed being generated by the needs of the culture to which one belongs,rather than by the imperatives set elsewhere.

One critic has described the mode of post-colonialism as "the operation of hearing oneself speak" invoking a sentence by Derrida used in a different context: "...the subject can hear or speak to himself and be affected by the signifier he produces, without passing through an external detour, the world, the sphere of what is not 'his own'. One major question that needs to be asked about post- colonialism and literary studies in India pertains to this 'external detour'. Is it possible—or if possible, desirable—in this age of travelling theory and quick international dissemination of ideas, to use signifiers that

leave out 'the world, the sphere of what is not his own'? If it is not possible, in what way does this pervasive presence of the world 'not our own' condition our discourse? What exactly is the difference then between the presumably liberating post-colonial theory that resists homogenization and the earlier hegemony of the Universalist mode?

## II

The genesis of this seminar goes back to January 1994 when Harish Trivedi wrote an editorial in our Association *Newsletter* titled 'From Commonwealth to Post-colonial?'. Many readers felt that it touched upon issues that needed further elaboration and debate. The immediate context of this editorial was the announced change in the name of the massive Roudedge Encyclopaedia project that began nearly a decade ago as of *The Enyclopaedia of Commonwealth Literature* but just before publication ultered its name to become The *Enyclopaedia of Post-colonial Literature in English*. Since the mid-sixties the term Commonwealth Literature has been used as the comprehensive label for all English writing that came out of the various British colonies, both during and after the era of imperial control. It was not a happy coinage, but for lack of a better descriptive term it gradually gained academic curren and got inscribed in the very name and history of the world-wide association (Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies) which has been propagating the study of and research in this area for thirty years. But recently, during the last decade or so, a new term 'post-colonial'— foregrounding the political dimension Of both the text and context of this literature—is being used more often, slowly pushing out the old and seemingly apolitical name 'Commonwealth Literature'. The new tide of the just published monumental Routledge volumes perhaps puts a seal of authority on this new term, knocking in the last nails on the coffin of the Anglocentric old label.

Changes in nomenclature may sometimes reflect passing fashions in academic jargon, but more often they are symptoms of major shifts in the terms of discourse, or a realignment of the epistemic

grids through which literary texts and their contexts are institutionally organized. The systematic study of Common wealth Literature began at the University of Leeds in the early sixties, and the journal published from there (The Journal of Commonwealth Literature) did much to encourage research in this field and bring together people whose starting points were different. To take my own example, I became aware of the concept of Commonwealth literature only after I had completed my doctoral work on Indian Novels in English. The discovery of Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiongo (then James Ngugi) or of George Lamming and Wilson Harris in the seventies was an exciting experience, but these writers could be brought into the classroom only under the template of Commonwealth Literature, because even the new and innovative University of Hyderabad where I was teaching in those days would not have considered offering a separate course on African Literature or on West Indian Literature. If one felt restive within the confining connotations of Commonwealth Literature, uneasy about the conceptual centrality of England implicit in it, one continued to suffer it because there were no easy alternatives available; also the enlargement of the literary horizon made possible the inclusion of texts from the African countries and the West Indies in our courses of study seemed too precious a gain to give up over a mere squabble over names.

At best Commonwealth Literature was a pedagogic convenience, rather than a creative or a theoretical concept, and the writers whose work was studied under this rubric seemed generally to resent its restrictive frame. Salman Rushdie's well-known condemnation of this 'phantom category/ was manifold: its assumption "that literature is an expression of nationality", its tendency to create a ghetto that could be patronised by the literary establishment, its insistence on lumping together very disparate writers just because they happen to write in English but keeping the British writers out of it: "It would never do to include English Literature, the great sacred thing itself, with this bunch of upstarts, huddling together under this new and badly made umbrella"

Now that the term Commonwealth Literature has finally fallen into academic disfavour, one can see that its biggest problem indeed

was the pre supposition that an umbilical cord tied all these diverse bodies of writing—from Australia, Canada, India, Nigeria, Kenya, Trinidad, Jamaica, Barbados and the rest—to the mother country England, which absent set the evaluative norms. Absent—because literature from Britain was never seen as part of this package Post-colonial Literature is presumably free of such centralist undertones; it decentering, plurality, hybridity, a dismantling of authority—hence in many ways it is an enabling and protean term.

On the other hand we should also carefully consider the extra-textual implications of this trendy label that catapults us into the centre-stage of an international academic arena, potentially offering us a privileged position, giving our research papers some space in certain metropolitan journals and making our critical monographs and manuscripts negotiable with multinational publishing houses. As academics interested in the study of Commonwealth Literature, we used to be furtive creatures, lurking in the margins Of English Departments, most of which had a concealed hierarchy that privileged. British Literature over any other, and even within that, Renaissance to Eighteenth century over later periods. But as post-ecolonialists we have suddenly become confident global intellectuals, part of a highly visible international fraternity or sorority who are redefining the notion of the text—equally at home in Sydney, Singapore, San Francisco or Shimla. I am not saying this merely for rhetorical flourish or alliterative effect. Three persons from our original list of Indian participants could not be present for this seminar, because one of them had to go to Hong Kong, the other to Adelaide, and the third to Leeds either immediately before or after our scheduled dates.

All this is very encouraging to us professionally, inspiring us to keep our passports constantly renewed and suitcases perpetually in a state of readiness. But it should not prevent us from also looking at the possible risks inherent in the formulation of post-coloniality as the common condition of contemporary civilization cutting across continents, or of making the specific configuration of circumstances in particular regions subservient to a global paradigm. If colonialism

disrupted or uprooted patterns of original culture in the colonized countries, surely there can be no comparison between the situations of, say the upper caste urban Indian and the slaves or the indentured labour who were transported across oceans, or the Australian aboriginals who were destroyed or disempowered in their own homelands Because the post-colonial analytical strategies work best where the dispossession of language, religion and culture has been of the most severe order there is just a possibility that any reading of a so-called post-colonial text might get subtly tilted in that direction, or only those texts might get highlighted that lend themselves to such readings.

These and similar issues, we had hoped, would be discussed at the Shimla seminar. There was also the suspicion of over-emphasis, particularly disconcerting to those Indian readers of literature who are as much insiders in their own languages as in English. The experience of colonialism undoubtedly permeated writings in all Indian languages directly or covertly, but not in all cases was there a total disjunction from pre-colonial culture. The term post-colonial tends to confer a central position to one century of European imperialism in the long narrative of human race, making it the determining marker of history, and without ever stating it in so many words, invests the English language with a measure of presence and influence that is somewhat out of proportion to what statistical or demographical facts would warrant.

The authors of *The Empire Writes Back* a volume which has been quite influential in the curricular spread of post-colonial literature in most Anglophone countries, define their scope thus:

> We use the term post-colonial to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.

This particular point became one of the crucial issues in interrogating post-colonialism as a concept. Two reviewers of the book had already sought clarification of the phrase 'continuity of preoccupations' in the statement quoted above:

> What is this continuity of preoccupations? Is it purely aesthetic? What is

the material basis of this aesthetic?

They went on to question the logic of putting the settler colonies like Australia and Canada in the same discursive frame as India when the weekly income of an average white Australian may be equal to the annual income of an Indian engaged in comparable work. Ignoring the material bases of culture diverts our attention from the concrete to the abstract, from the real to the allegorical. One of the two reviewers happened to be present at the Shimla seminar, as also one of the writers of The Empire Writes but the debate on this issue did not remain a dialogue between the two of them—it was discussed in a general way by the other participants as well.

Several diasporic Indians have been pioneers in the area of post-colonial theory, and the field is now densely peopled with academics in American universities who originally came from the ex-colonies. But, as of now no major theoretical contribution has come to this discourse from home-based Indian intellectuals, and the reason for this absence may well be explored with the tools honed by cultural critics who sometimes look at the production, dissemination and reception of ideas in material and market terms.

The English departments in India have not remained entirely unaffected by post-colonial discourse. There are two different aspects of its influence. The first has to do with class room teaching and the mismatch between the old traditional canon Of EngLit texts that was presented as the essence of literary value for all time, and the politically conscious attitude of the newly decolonised English teacher in India. In recent years there have been some fruitful analysis of the ideology and politics of the post-colonial class room. The resistance to the old pedagogy ideally manifests itself in two impulses: one, reading the canonical texts against the grain—a post-colonial strategy; and two, introducing in the curriculum non- canonical texts, many of which come from outside England, and most of which could be subsumed under the broad category of Postcolonial Literature.

The second aspect of the influence can be seen in our professional compulsion to speak the same language and adopt the same frame of discourse that people from our discipline are doing all over the

world, in order to belong to an international community. Even when one is convinced about the need to be rooted to an indigenous perspective, not many teachers could honestly say that he or she would turn down the opportunity to be published abroad, and the conditions and ground rules of such publication are determined by academies not ours. Thus the faith that the transition from the colonial to the post-colonial is basically a movement towards greater autonomy may not be always sustainable. In the actual circumstances of our daily lives also we know that the territorial form of colonialism has given way to other and subtler forms of domination in the realms of econom , indus, entertainment, culture and ideas.

In a paper published in *The Economic and Political Weekly* in January 1994, Darshan Perusekh has suggested an excellent metaphor for the new shift in the balance of trade between the first World and the Third World (if such terminology may still be used) in which the most exciting new literature is emerging from the erstwhile colonies while the most provocative theoretical apparatus is emanating from the western metropolitan centres which can process this Third World literature with sophistication. In a way this reiterates the familiar town/country relationship between the empire and the colonies with the latter providing raw material to the former, to be made into finished products shipped back for consumption.

Finding the analogy very apt, I had begun to elaborate it in the familiar terms of raw cotton being exported from colonial India and mill made cloth being received from Manchester, until a historian friend curbed my metaphoric fancy by pointing out the fallacy in the popular myth. There is some consolation in the fact that the fallacy is not mine alone, and remains encapsulated in A.K. Ramanujan's memorable lines:

…and also, anything that goes out
will come back, processed and often
with long bills attached,
like the hooped bales of cotton
shipped off to invisible Manchesters
and brought back milled and folded
for a price, cloth for our days

middle-class loins, and muslin
for our richer nights.

My historian friend informed me that Indian cotton was rarely used in the mills of Manchester except in the years of the American Civil War when American cotton was unavailable. The fibre of the Indian cotton, he said, was too short for commercial purposes. He chided me for the literary critic's tendency to appropriate historical data without verifying their factual accuracy.

I am not sure exactly what moral this mistaken metaphor or its correction carries, but it can lead us to two further questions. Like the multi-national manufacturing companies which first create a desire, and then supply its attractive merchandise without which people had blissfully survived so far but now find it indispensable? Are we sure that the fibres of every civilization have the necessary length or elasticity to be successfully processed in the theoretical of technologically advanced countries, or do we need to devise appropriate technology for them? These simple, somewhat crude and introductory questions were posited as the preliminary statement to mark the opening of the seminar 'Interrogating Postcolonialism' by way of clearing the ground for the more complex issues, which followed in the next three days, and are articulated in the essays of this volume.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What basic considerations of our cultures, languages and literatures inform Meenakshi Mukherjee's 'Interrogating Post-colonialism'?

2. Is Mukherjee's essay an argument between margins and the centre? What reformed model of post-colonialism does she propose?

# Part Two

# Section D:  Novel

UNIT FIFTEEN

# Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*
## Discussion and Questions

**About the author** Chinua Achebe (b. 1930) is Africa's best known and 'most widely read author in the world. Since the rublication of *Things Fail Apart* (1958), Achebe's reputatien as a writer-activist and educator has been growing steadily, winning for him numerous awards, visitorships, and honours including a nomination as president of the PEN International in 1989. Since 1990, Achebe has been teaching at Bard College, New Yor.

**About the novel** *Things Fail Apart* is a classic, a major achievemen in twentieth-century fiction. Things Fall Apart portrays he gradual disintegration of Nigerian culture during the time of the first Igbo contact with Western culture. Nigeria's contact with the West began with the white Christian missions and colonial officials who began their work in Eastern Nigeria during the late nineteenth century. Although Achebe has no intention of sentimentalizing the African past, he is surely pained to see a highly developed culture, both humane and orderly, now being rudely undermined and transformed. Achebe, in other words, is more keen on capturing and reflecting a process of socio-historical change in his novel than simply elegizing an African past that has disappeared.

## Topics/Hints for Critical Discussion

- The epigraph from W. B. Yeats's 'Second Coming'. Considering that W.B. Yeats belonged to Ireland, England's, first colony, is it surprising that Achebe begins with Yeats? The contintities between the colonies are easier to grasp than

those between the centre and the peripnery. 'The centre cannot hold'!

- It is advantageous to remember at the outset that Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* of 1958 comes in the wake of very powerful, if misleading, representations in fiction of Africa and its people in Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902), Joyce Carey's *Mister Jelinson* (1939), and Graham Greene's *Heart of the Matter* (1948)
  Of special interest here is Achebe's own reaction to Mister Johnson, Carey's novel on which he said : '[I]t was clear to me that [Carey's novel] was a most superficial picture - not only of the country - but even of the Nigerian character, and so I thought if [this novel] was'famous, then perhaps someone ought to try and look at this from tHe'inside', (*African Writers Talking : A Collection of Radio Interviews; ed*. Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duerden. London: Heinemarn, 1972.)
  Achebe's idea then, was to present an insider's view of the indignities heaped on the socio-cultural lives of the Africans by the white colonizers.

- 'When Unoka died he had taken mol title at all 'and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him?' (p.7) Does this remark help you see that character of Okonkwo in some favourable light?

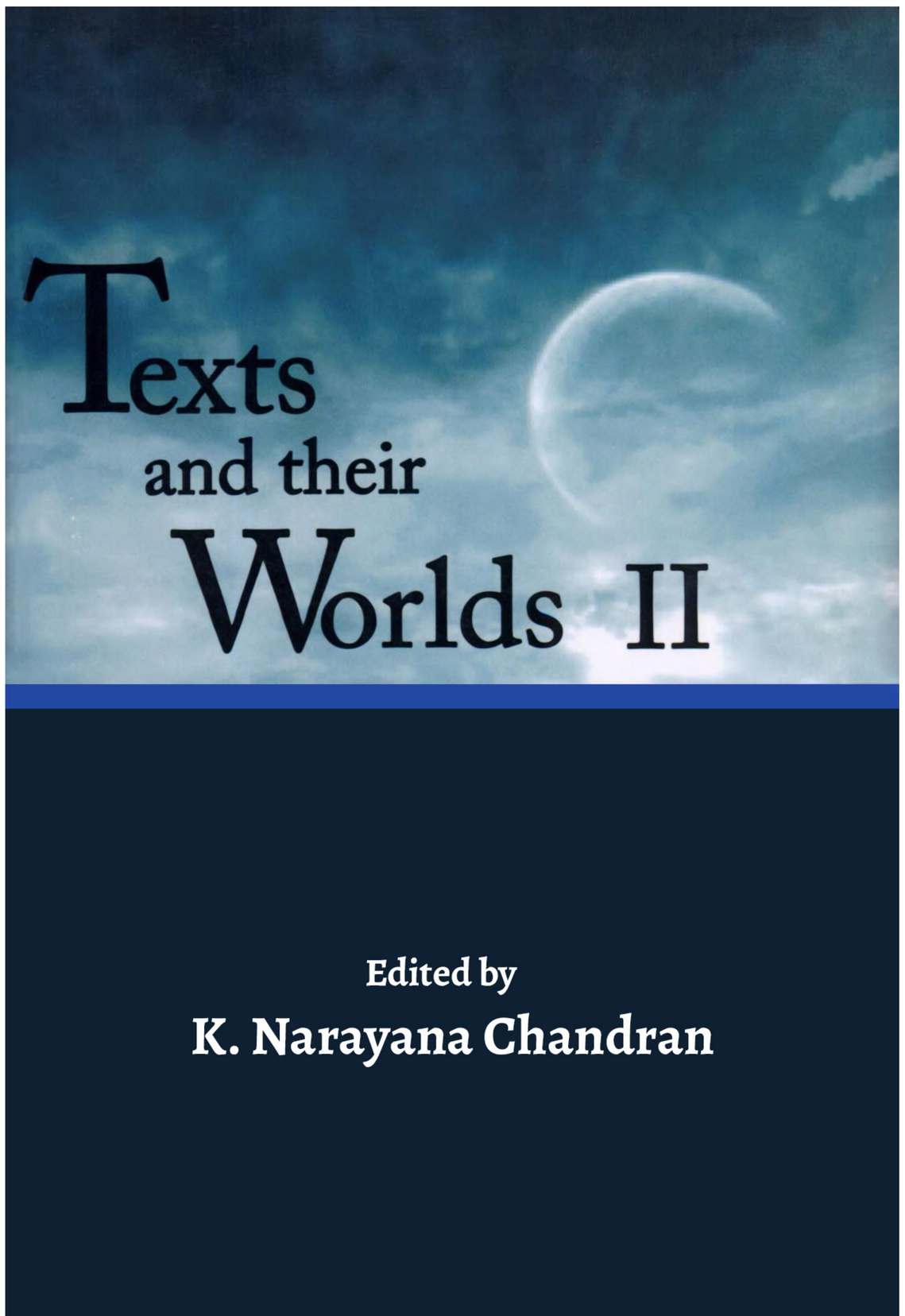
- Okonkwo's ambition and impatience and the tragic reversals in his life.

- Okonkwo and his family-chiefly, his relationships with Ezinma, his daughter; Nwoye, his son.

- The lineage of pride, guilt, and resistance represented by the' three generations of men:
  Unuka
  Okonkwo
  Nwoye

- Suggestions of heroic qualities in Okonkwo-'If ever a man deserved his success, that man was Okonkwo.' (p.25) Collect other passages, read them in tandem, to see whether Things Fall Apart is presented as a 'tragedy' in the Aristotelian sense,' i.e., 'the tragedy of one man'. Several interesting details of

character, setting, and plot are anchored in Ikemefuna: the relationship between Ikemefuna and the Okonkwo family, especially, Nwoye; hir killing etc. (Is he a 'scapegoat' in a tragic setting?)




- Tribal rituals and ce
remonies in Umuofia. The feast of the New
- Yam (chapters V, VI)-feasting and fellowship; wrestling contest; the *ilo*, the village playground, the drums.
-

Chapter X-'the most secret cult in the clan'-the *Egwugwu* and their leader, Evil Forest. Admixture of faith and superstition, dispensing of local justice.

Chapter XI-Ekwefi's story-discussion of the folk-elements

Ezirma's story-its interruption and the prophecy of Chielo

Questions for Discussion

1. Is it possible for readers of Things Fall Apart to discern an implicit criticism of the western world, of notions of superior power vested in its political and cultural institutions? Cite instances and argue your case.

## Questions for Discussion

1. What colonial attitudes and power relations does Things Fall Apart criticize? Why does its author advance this critique?

2. For Achebe the problem of social change and the problem of artistic expression are inextricable. How does the language of Things Fall Apart bear this out?

3. Comment on the women characters in Things Fall Apart. What picture of Ibo society do they help create?

UNIT SIXTEEN

# David Malouf's *Fly Away Peter*

## Discussion and Questions

**About the author** David Malouf (b. 1934) is an Australian writer who spent some of his early years in Europe, and later, some years as a school teacher in England. Since then he has taught at the University of Sydney in Australia. He quit teaching to become a full-time writer in 1977. A writer of poetry and novellas, Malouf is a keen observer and chronicler of identities and selves in transit. Home, migration, exile, and the conflicts that shape human character are among his 'temes.

**About the novel** *About the novel* Fly Away Peter, like his other stories, deals with the tension between cultured Europe' and 'natural Australia' and affirms the interdependence of human life and nature. Published in 1982, Fly Away Peter has three characters, two men and one woman: Ashely Crowther (the owner of a sanctuary), Jim Saddler (his employee), and Imogen Harcourt (a wildlife photographer).

## Topics/Hints for Critical Discussion

- The title and the two epigraphs.
  Recall Peter (Simon, the son of Jonas) whom Jesus meets at Bethany. Jesus named him *Cuphas*, equivalent of *Petros*, the rock. (Connect this to 'the stone' of the Stevens lines, the second epigraph.) Peter was elected to be the rock on which future churches were to be founded.
  Peter can't, therefore, fly away when the divine mandate holds. He should remain unshaken and unshakeable. If vou recall the Peter stories in the Bible, Peter was intensely loyal at some

- Imogen Harcourt and her role in Fly Away Peter. It is arguable whether Imogen has any major role in this story except as a symbolic mother-figure, or as an approving female presence whenever man and Nature meet cn friendly terms. (cf. Imogen and her camera-the latter an unobtrusive recorder of reality.) Only towards the end of the narrative does Imogen emerge as a 'discoverer'. She mourns Jim's leath, 'still carrying her equipment -came ra, plates, tripod -... "like the implements of martyrdom" ... ' (chapter 18, p.137). Imogen also performs 'a choric function' by summarizing for us the lesson of this tragedy, Jim's passing: 'What had torn at her breast ir. the fact of Jim's death had been the waste of it, all those days that had been gathered towards nothing but his senseless and brutal extinction.' (Fly Away Peter, p.139-140).

- Chorus-wise, Imogen sums up, again, the personal significance of her first meeting with Jim, and thereby the significence of Fly Away Peter. Towards the conciusion of this narrative, Imogen ponders ways of seeing, and what we make of them. The following passage captures this significance brilliantly:

  > Her pain lay in the acute vision she had had...
  > utterly present.
  >
  > It was that intense focus of his whole being, it's me,
  > Jim Saddler ...
  >
  > ... It simply was.
  >
  > (*Fly Away Peter*, p.140)

- It may be that Malouf vouchsafes Imogen a deeper vision, or significance, that he has all along denied the two men of this story. Like her camera, Imogen is both a 'reflector' and 'recorder par excellence of a reality outside ordinary time and place. What is this signifit ance/vision?

  It may be summarized as man's completeness, his perfection, when he is at one with Nature, as wnen '[Jim's] own being that was just then so very like the birds, alert, unique, utterly present' (*Fly Away Peter*, p. 140).

  The other significance, again, is the perfection to which lim's experiences lead him. Life, as Imogen reflects, means 'a unique

presence, and, it [is] essential in every creature. A life [isn't] *for* anything. It simply is.' (*Fly Away Peter*, p.140).

## Questions for Discussion

1. How does David Malouf advance the narrative of Fly Away Peter by setting Jim, the natural man, against Ashley, the man of culture? And this granted, how would you locate Imogen?

2. How does *Fly Away Peter* juxtapose and foreground natural innocence and: human violence?

3. How significant are avian perspectives and bird metaphors in *Fly Away Peter*? Cimment pointediy on select perspectives/ metaphors.

4. How does war remake Jim's identity? What significance does Imogen see in this remaking?

5. Comment on the *poetic* language of Malouf's fiction. Identify suitable passages for this purpose from *Fly Away Peter* and consider how language matches the 'visionary' reality it seeks to capture.

# Pattern for the Question Paper

The pattern suggested here is more or less in keeping with what students are familiar with from Paper I and Paper II.

i. As in Paper I and Paper II, essay type answers carry 15 marks and short notes carry 5 marks each.

ii. Students answer one question each from Poetry, Drama and Novel sections, and this question carries 15 marks. Short fiction and essays are combined in one section of the question paper which carries 25 marks. These marks are distributed over one essay type question of 15 marks and two short notes of 5 marks each. The short note question here is therefore compulsory. There is however plenty of choice in this section, as fiction and essays together carry these 25 marks.

iii. It would not be possible for students to leave out a novel or a drama text.

Accordingly, the following pattern is suggested for thr annual scheme. The pattern provided here is for Paper III. It may also be followed for Paper IV.

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Q 1. | Poetry | 1 x 15 | 15 marks |
| Q2. | Short Fiction and Essays | a. 1 x 15<br>b. 2 x 5 | 15 marks<br>10 marks |
| Q 3. | Drama<br>*Hayavadana* 1 x 15<br>*Final Solutions* 1 x 15 | 2 x 15 | 30 marks |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Q4. | Novel | | 2 x 15 | 30 marks |
| | *The Guide* | 1×15 | | |
| | *Breaking Ties* | 1x15 | | |

Note : 1. All questions carrying 15 marks are essay type questions. Here students answer ou: of 4 questions. (3 essay type questions followed by 3 our of 5 short notes.)

2. All questlons carrying 5 marks are short note questions. In the compulsory short nute questian, i.e. Q 2(b), students may be asked to write 2 out of 4 short noter.

# Texts and their Worlds II

Texts and their Worlds II (European and Non-European Writing:An Introduction) attempts to introduce students to literatures of European and non-European nations. The selections provide a sampling of diverse texts which open windows into the worlds in which they were created. They bid the reader to think, to understand, and, most importantly, to deploy these ideas beyond the classroom.

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Prof. K. Narayana Chandran, the editor of this anthology, teaches in the University of Hyderabad.

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